

CINEFANTASTIQUE

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BABYLON 5

STAR TREK'S TV CHALLENGER

REN & STIMPY
Why creator John
Kricfalusi got dumped

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III

A preview of the comic book sensation's movie comeback

Volume 23 Number 5



TIME WAITS FOR NO MAN...

TRANCERS III

DETH LIVES



Guns, judo, drugs ...
and brains. There's
a new brand of
Trancers in town.
They're tougher than
ever before and
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their next recruit.

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Line Producer KEITH PAYSON Music Composed by MARK RYDER & PHIL DAVIES and RICHARD BAND Visual Effects by MOTION OPTICALS, INC. Director of Photography ADOLFO BARTOLI, A.I.C.
Production Designer MILO Executive Producer CHARLES BAND Edited by MARGARET-ANNE SMITH and LAUREN SCHAFER
Produced by ALBERT BAND Casting by MACDONALD & BULLINGTON C.S.A.
Directed by C. COURTNEY JOYNER



Rated R for strong violence, and
for sexuality and language.



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The magazine with a "Sense of Wonder."

FEBRUARY, 1993

CINEFANTASTIQUE has been publishing for over 22 years, and in that time we've largely ignored horror, fantasy and science fiction on television. And for good reason. Outside of STAR TREK, there hasn't been much worth covering. We think that's about to change. This issue's cover story on BABYLON 5 previews the two-hour movie pilot for a new syndicated television series that won't debut until February. It's the first cover story this magazine has ever done on a TV show other than STAR TREK.

We're sticking our necks out a little bit here. We haven't seen BABYLON 5. But as you'll discover from writer Mark A. Altman's on-set report of the pilot's filming last August, the show, set on a massive interstellar space station, a Casablanca in space that serves as the nexus for the great military, economical and cultural forces of the universe, is one of the most ambitious science fiction projects ever mounted for television, or feature films for that matter. Altman interviews series creator J. Michael Straczynski, who declared war last issue by saying his new show "would kick STAR TREK's ass." Our cover story examines every facet of the would-be science fiction epic from its makeup to art direction to costume design. And effects expert Les Paul Robley examines the new state-of-the-art computer graphics technology that makes the series' stunning and complex space opera visuals possible on a low budget. BABYLON 5 marks a revolution in low-cost high-tech special effects that will bring the full imaginative scope of horror, fantasy and science fiction within the budget grasp of television.

There's just one problem. STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE, the spin-off series also set on an interstellar space station, debuts on Paramount's syndicated network January 4, a full month before BABYLON 5. And DEEP SPACE NINE looks pretty terrific itself, outspending its video rival by a margin of about three to one. Is there room on television for two space station series? Can BABYLON 5 make an impact in STAR TREK's wake? Tune in next issue for our cover story on DEEP SPACE NINE.

Frederick S. Clarke



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Ren & Stimpy

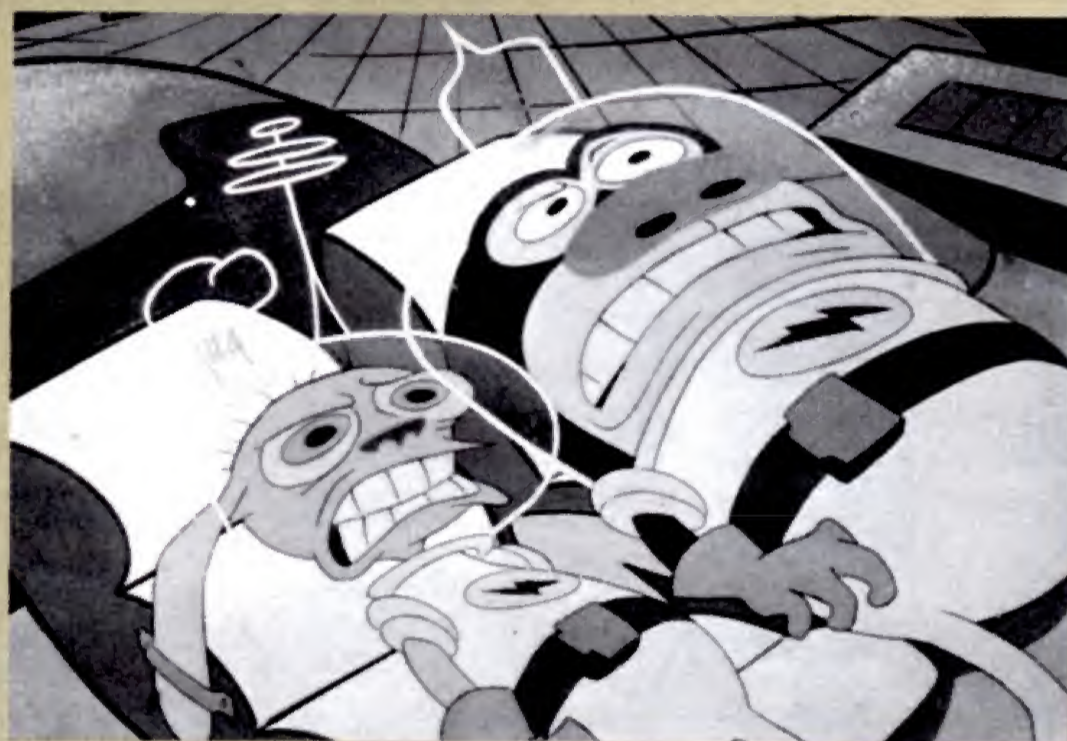
MASSACRE

Was creator John Kricfalusi fired, or is "creative consultant" a promotion?

By Dan Persons

The signs had been in the air months before the news broke: the missed air-dates, the budget struggles, the battles over content. By the time the story hit the trades, most people in the industry could have read it with their eyes closed: John Kricfalusi—maverick animation director, number-one Spumco Big Shot, and voice of everyone's favorite asthma-hound Chihuahua, Ren Hoek—was stepping down from the day-to-day production responsibilities of Nickelodeon's hit, **THE REN AND STIMPY SHOW**. It seemed only par for the course: Kricfalusi has been a figure of controversy in the animation industry for years,

Kricfalusi, lionized by the L.A. Times in August before being dumped from the show by Nickelodeon in September.



Ren & Stimpy's adventures, now in their second year, have proved a hit with critics and audiences as part of Nickelodeon's cartoon block on Sunday mornings.

while Nickelodeon was walking a tightrope between honest desire to provide cutting-edge entertainment and an equally strong, actuarial urge to reap as much profit from the breakout hit as possible.

John Kricfalusi has been stirring things up in Hollywood ever since his 1987 debut as director on Ralph Bakshi's and CBS' **THE NEW ADVENTURES OF MIGHTY MOUSE**. In rapid succession, he garnered praise from the critics for his innovative animation style, anxiety from the network when the censorious media troglodyte Donald Wildmon claimed to have seen Mighty Mouse snorting cocaine (stay away from the sacramental wine, Don), and anguish from Bakshi over money disputes (according to Bakshi, Kricfalusi demanded 30% of the

upcoming second season profits; another source had it that Bakshi owed Kricfalusi for non-MIGHTY MOUSE work already completed). Kricfalusi had even less luck on Dic's **BEANIE AND CECIL** revival, where his desire to revive creator Bob Clampett's animator-intensive style—using production techniques that would eventually be applied to **REN AND STIMPY**—ran afoul of straight-laced ABC executives who expected every story element to be locked-down before the first sheet of paper hit the drafting table. The series failed to last its first season.

Once again "at liberty," Kricfalusi received word that Nickelodeon vice president of animation Vanessa Coffey was looking for "animator's projects," concepts with a more personalized touch than the

typical Saturday morning fare. Kricfalusi caught Coffey's eye with a sketch of an emaciated Chihuahua and a plump, dim-witted cat. The top brass at Nickelodeon agreed that the cartoon pair had something about them, and money was apportioned for a pilot.

The result, "Big House Blues," was an unqualified success, both on the film festival circuit and with pre-teen focus groups. A test run of six episodes was ordered, and Kricfalusi gathered his associates—Bob Camp, Jim Smith and Lynne Naylor—to form Spumco, an animation company that quickly swelled from four people in a one-room studio to a 50-person production facility occupying a building close by the corner of Hollywood and Gower. **THE REN AND STIMPY SHOW** had its debut in August, 1991, as part of the "Nicktoons" block of Sunday morning cartoons.

In a matter of weeks, it became obvious that Nickelodeon had something special on its hands. Ratings were high, critical response was positive. But while Nickelodeon, Kricfalusi and the entire Spumco crew were riding the crest of sudden and unexpected popularity, all involved were also sewing the seeds that would eventually lead to Kricfalusi's firing. At Nickelodeon, there was growing anxiety over the director's alleged inability to deliver episodes on time, a problem exacerbated by the late arrival of one of the series'

CALENDAR

THE CARTOON SHOW THAT'S EATING AMERICA

John Kricfalusi is the creator of two "shows" who are not related and off the wall. But if you think "Ren & Stimpy" is only for the terminally hip, hang on—his new cartoon (which could be just around the corner by Donald Latham Page 4)

The wedding marriage of L.A. "Ren" and Stimpy Page 3

Can young comics find an in the depths of the "From Club" Page 6

Witness the "Ren" and Stimpy and the look of being with in America Page 8

REMEMBER Grosser is Funnier!



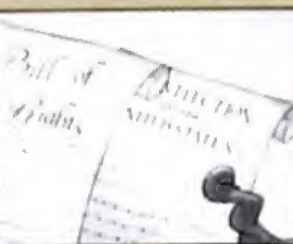
Ren (left) and Stimpy, evicted from Kricfalusi's Spumco cartoon production company. Nickelodeon has turned over the show to Kricfalusi associate Bob Camp.

most celebrated episodes, "Stimpy's Invention." At Spumco, friction began to form over progressive signs of timidity from the Nickelodeon brass, with daily arguments occurring between Kricfalusi and his higher-ups over what was suitable for the network's young viewers. Any hopes that the situation would be remedied by the start of the second season were quickly dashed. Prior to the season's start, Kricfalusi demanded that the number of ordered episodes—originally set at 20—be reduced to 13. Nickelodeon agreed, but by early August, meetings were being held to rework the budget—set by the *L.A. Times* at \$400,000 per half-hour. Even before any new show had hit the air, Nickelodeon rejected one segment, "Man's Best Friend," for reasons neither Nick nor Kricfalusi would specify.

The second season made its debut in mid-August, with the new episodes heavily promoted by Nickelodeon as the main draw of their Saturday evening

"Snick" programming block. However, no sooner had the premiere half-hour finished than the network started receiving complaints about one cartoon, "Powdered Toast Man," in which the titular superhero warmed up the White House's Oval Office by throwing the Constitution and the Bill of Rights on the fire. Meant as a bit of gratuitous outrageousness, the joke instead incensed a small, literal-minded segment of the audience, who then

What are the kids watching on Sunday mornings? "Powdered Toast Man" riled the conservatives.



Crumpling the Constitution and Bill of Rights to roast marshmallows in the Oval Office fireplace.



AXED AUTEUR ADVICE

"I was fired as producer and director," said Kricfalusi. "I can consult to my heart's content and I'm not going to get REN & STIMPY cartoons made. You can't 'consult' a film."

aimed their ire in the direction of the FCC. Nickelodeon subsequently decided that it might be better if "Powdered Toast Man" beat his buns back into the void. The episode was pulled from all future air-dates.

The rest of the season continued in the same vein. By the second week, a "Big House Blues" rerun was trotted out to fill the latter part of the half hour. The third week saw a completely new show, but by the fourth week re-runs were again in place, even though the announced episode, "The Dog Show," was ready to run (like "Man's Best Friend," this episode featured George Liquor, a new character not favored by the Nickelodeon brass—the network now says it will air the cartoon). From that point, into October it was recycled REN AND STIMPY; by Nickelodeon's count (which included the pair of never-aired episodes), the producers had missed at least two air-dates.

At the end of September, Nickelodeon released a statement: by mutual agreement, Kricfalusi was stepping down as REN AND STIMPY's chief auteur—an easily orchestrated event, given that Nickelodeon owns all rights to the characters and can assign them wherever they please. Kricfalusi cohort Bob Camp would leave

Spumco to head a newly appointed production team that Nickelodeon was establishing in-house. Kricfalusi would act as a consultant for the series.

Some things, though, weren't covered in the two-page release. A large percentage of Spumco personnel were sacked in the shake-up; a skeleton crew currently watches over the facility while Kricfalusi works to get new projects under way. Rumor has it that Nickelodeon, in their zeal to speed production and settle into a more predictable pattern, will gradually back off the show's domestically produced elements, and eventually ship storyboards overseas for the animation process.

Kricfalusi, for one, took issue with many of the accusations being circulated, especially those suggesting his inability to produce on deadline. By his account, the fault lies more with the executives who couldn't make decisions in a timely fashion. "Nobody bothered to check into the reasons why the shows weren't being delivered," said Kricfalusi. "I offered to show the president of Nickelodeon and the president of MTV—in fact, I *did* show the president of MTV—a record showing exactly the missed approvals, the

continued on page 60

TEENAGE MUTANT TURTLES III

The comic book phenomenon is back in

By Dale Kutzera

After taking a year off, those nun-chuck-wielding Turtles are coming back with a different look, a different director and a different special effects company. When the original TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES became the surprise mega-hit of 1990 (it was the fourth highest grossing film of the year) there was little doubt a sequel was in store. What *was* a surprise was how fast it came. Merely a year after the original, PART II: THE SECRET OF THE OOZE was at every local multiplex, dressing up a weak, re-hashed storyline with new and improved Turtle technology. Before you could say cowabunga, Golden Harvest, the film's Hong Kong-based producer and New Line Cinema, the distributor, raked in another \$78 million. Could a third film be far behind?

Well, yes and no. TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III will cartwheel into theatres in March of 1993, two years after the second installment. This is still downright speedy when compared to, say, an entry in the STAR WARS or INDIANA JONES chronicles, but nothing compared to the remarkable one year turnaround between the first two films. What happened? Did the Turtles take a vacation? Did the producers run out of foam latex? No one on the set of the new installment, filming in Astoria, Oregon would say. The most likely reason for delaying the encore seems to be the fact that the Turtles phenomenon has demonstrated some real legs and the producers don't have to worry about the fad becoming passe before they can crank out another sequel.

Unlike its predecessor, TURTLES III is

“After parts I and II, the Turtles gave their feature film career a rest for a year. What happened? Did they take a vacation? Did the producers run out of foam latex?”



Lights, camera, action!—filming part III on the sets inside an abandoned airplane hangar in Astoria, Oregon. New Line Cinema opens the new sequel in March.

no quickie sequel. This time the ingenuity of the special effects is matched by an imaginative story. The beautiful reporter April O'Neil (once again played by Paige Turco) unknowingly activates a time-traveling scepter and is bolted back 400 years to 17th-century Japan. To make matters worse, she finds herself the captive of the ruthless warlord Norinaga (Sab Shimono) and a merciless arms-trading pirate, Dirk Walker (Stuart Wilson, the baddie from LETHAL WEAPON 3). Before you can say seven samurai, the Turtles find the scepter and are off to rescue April and save a helpless village from the brutal warlord. Also returning is the hockey stick-swinging sidekick Casey Jones from the first film. Elias Koteas returns to the role after

being absent from the second adventure.

Turco and Koteas are two of the few familiar faces in TURTLES III. Producers Thomas Gray and David Chan, co-producer Terry Morse and production designer Roy Forge Smith are the only other members of the behind-the-scenes production team back from the first two films. New at the helm is Canadian writer/director Stuart Gillard, a comedy veteran who was story editor on MORK AND MINDY and wrote and produced the film IF YOU COULD SEE WHAT I HEAR with Marc Singer. Gone is the Henson Creature Shop. Gone is Vanilla Ice. And left behind are the offices and studios of Carolco's Wilmington, North Carolina production base facility.

In order to match the smoky hills and peaceful valleys of feudal Japan, TURTLES III set up shop on the other side of America, in Astoria, reportedly after bypassing Vancouver as too expensive. The \$21 mil-

lion production was based in a vacant naval airbase near the Columbia River. Here production designer Roy Forge Smith transformed a WWII-era airplane hangar into four functioning soundstages. "It was totally empty from wall to wall," said Smith. "We built new walls and divided it up so we could be filming in two places at once. Our schedule needed four closed spaces and I had to have a big one for the castle."

Warlord Norinaga's incredible castle courtyard occupied one full half of the hangar. Another quarter contained the familiar set of the Turtle's sewer hideout and the remaining quarter was divided into two stages containing a variety of smaller sets including a blacksmith's

NINJA

movie action.

cabin, a dungeon and various rooms and corridors within the castle. In addition, an authentic Japanese village complete with thatched roofs and a bamboo fence was constructed on a wooded hillside just south of Astoria.

The multiple stages were needed to occupy the film's dueling crews. As on the first films, two full camera crews shot simultaneously, one with the animatronic Turtles and the other with the fighting Turtles. This way 14 weeks worth of filming could be squeezed into the seven-week shooting schedule. Eight Turtle suits were made for each performer and martial artist, a total of 72 complete suits, plus eight for the stuntmen used to bring the four Turtles to life.

The job of creating these marvels of foam and animatronic technology was assigned to Eric Allard's All Effects Company, marking the departure of Jim Henson's Creature Shop, which pioneered the computer and radio control systems involved. Co-producer Terry Morse first approached makeup artist Rick Stratton, a frequent collaborator with All Effects,



Raphael shows off the Turtles' new look—effects suits and animatronics by makeup artist Rick Stratton and Eric Allard of North Hollywood's All Effects, replacing the London-based Henson Creature Shop at a cost savings.

who was working on Francis Coppola's DRACULA. "I thought we could do it, but the only way would be to team up with Eric Allard, who has the best mechanical effects and robotics facility ever," said Stratton.

Allard was at first skeptical that Golden Harvest would ever part company with the Henson Creature Shop after working together on both previous films. "I said, 'Terry, if you're looking for somebody to give you a low bid to beat Henson down, then I'll be glad to bid the show for you—but only if I've got a real chance of getting

it. But I've got to let you know it's going to be expensive. It's very complicated stuff.' And he said, 'No, we're legitimately looking for somebody else. We know there are others in this town who can do it.'"

Allard spent three days with his staff preparing a detailed proposal which earned All Effects a spot in the final review. Eventually the combination of Allard's mechanical effects experience and Stratton's special effects makeup knowledge put them in the lead, despite the fact that their estimate of \$2.8 million was the highest bid. "The Hensons had the right to look at my proposal and see if they could match my price and they didn't feel they could," said Allard. "So we were in the Turtle business."

In the next four months, All Effects built nine hand controls, 10 remote-controlled heads, 16 non-animated heads and 72 suits. Because the Henson Creature Shop kept the Turtles and control units they created for the first films, All Effects started from scratch. All they had to work from were videotapes of the first films, publicity photos provided by the producers and a remarkably informative article on the making of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II in *Cinefantastique* magazine [June 1991, Vol 21:6]. "We copied and distributed the article to everybody in the shop and honestly got more useful information out of that than any one source," said Allard. "I've always said if you give me \$2.8 million and 80 people there's nothing I can't do." □

Hong Kong producer Golden Harvest hired Canadian Stuart Gillard to write and direct a time travel story in which the Turtles come to the rescue of reporter April O'Neil in feudal Japan. Leonardo enters the fray.



Those Little Dickens, The Muppets

Kermit plays Bob Cratchit to Michael Caine's Scrooge.

By Alan Jones

From Ashly Miller's 1908 silent movie version of *A Christmas Carol* to Richard Donner's irreverent SCROODGED 80 years later, Charles Dickens' 1843 fable of miserly misanthropy-turned-unselfish philanthropy has endured throughout the decades in many cinematic guises. Now it's the turn of Jim Henson Productions Ltd. to give the evergreen parable a whole new fantasy spin. *THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL* finds Gonzo playing Dickens, Kermit the Frog as Bob Cratchit and hecklers Statler and Waldorf portraying the Marley brothers in a period retelling of the timeless tale of skinflint Ebenezer Scrooge changing his stingy ways when haunted by the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future. Walt Disney opens the film nationwide at Christmas.

It was Disney who made the last version of the Dickensian classic to feature non-humans, the cartoon short *MICKEY'S CHRISTMAS CAROL* in 1983, and Disney backed Hen-



Caine and Kermit in the new musical version of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" with an all Muppet cast, the Henson organization's bid for a holiday classic.

son's "medium-to-low" reincarnation, which also stars "real" actors Michael Caine, Meredith Braun and Steve Mackintosh. They're joined by Muppet veterans Jerry Nelson, David Goelz, Frank Oz (also executive producer), and Steve Whitmire, who takes over the late Jim Henson's role as Kermit. Shot on old-fashioned Hallmark greeting card-type snowy sets at Shepperton

Studios in England throughout the summer of 1992, *THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL* is the first major movie assignment the Henson company has undertaken since the death of its founder in May, 1990. It also marks the feature film directing debut of Brian Henson, now president and chief executive officer of his father's organization. Noted Henson, "Nothing much has changed since I took over, apart from the decision not to merge Henson Associates, Inc. with the Walt Disney company. I've just reorganized things to bring us down to manageable size and hit stable ground. We're not so much an unwieldy mini-studio now as we were before my father died. The strong auxiliary divisions—merchandising, licensing and publishing—were kept in-house, with room for expansion. And we're developing relationships with different companies for distribution strength rather than ally ourselves to just one. But the work ethic remains the same. Our philosophy will always be to



With the Ghost of Christmas Present.

produce quality entertainment that helps people understand and respect each other. That's really what our shows are about."

Henson puppeteered on practically every one of his father's projects from *THE GREAT MUPPET CAPER* to *THE WITCHES*, turning second unit director for *TEEN-AGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES* and winning an Emmy award for helming TV's *MOTHER GOOSE STORIES*. "But directing theatrical features was always my game plan until the business side took over," explained Henson, who can never remember a time, "apart from a few years in boarding school," when Muppets weren't in his life.

THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL started development at the beginning of 1991. "It seemed a natural," Henson recalled. "We'd never done any of the classic stories with Muppets before. Prior Muppet movies took place in our world and the characters constantly fought that largeness and reality base. Picking a sober and sinister locale like Victorian London, with production designer Val Strazovec's crooked, claustrophobic false perspective and pur-



Disney opens **THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL** nationwide on December 25.

posedly stagebound sets, means the Muppets' absurdity is much more amplified. Therefore they don't have to be quite so zany and are given the chance to shine even more."

Continued Henson, "On the surface, it sounds like the most absurd mismatch you could imagine. Yet the conflict of styles is what has made this so exciting. The strange thing is we've been able to do the most faithful adaptation of the novel as a result. The unique twist is the Muppets. But put them into Dickens and you create a new universe with its own direction without veering from the beloved original story at all."

Longtime Muppet writer, and scripter of **THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL**, Jerry Juhl, agreed with Henson's assessment. "When this project was first discussed it was so easy to think in terms of parody," said Juhl. "So rather than let the Muppets ride roughshod over Dickens, I went back to the novel and decided it would be rotten of us to belittle the quality of one of the greatest stories of all time. I was determined to preserve the intent and honest emotions of the piece, while overlaying the Muppet brand of craziness."

But having Dickens and the Muppets exist side-by-side without destroying each other was a tricky coalition to pull off, Juhl admitted. "That's why I'm glad I could write this project at a leisurely pace," he said. "Once we decided Scrooge had to be a proper actor it was very much a case of rearranging the Muppet characters in various combinations. Miss Piggy was the Ghost of Christmas Present at one stage before becoming Mrs. Cratchit. And Fozzie Bear was the Ghost of Christmas Past before we made him the owner of Fozziewig's Factory, 'Supplier of Novelties to the Music Hall Trade,' i.e. rubber chickens and clown

Visual effects make the Muppets more fully realized performers: Kermit skating.



noses. None of it worked. That avenue was purely for cheap laughs. But once I thought of Gonzo as Dickens commenting on the action, I realized I could give him the writer's authentic prose. With Rizzo the Rat as his comic foil, the Dickensian subtext shone through. Now the Muppets are playing the roles like they were actors and don't make light of the whole filmmaking process as they did in the previous movies."

Brian Henson puts the eternal appeal of Dickens' novel down to the fact that there's a little bit of Scrooge in everyone. "Everyone thinks Scrooge is the antagonist," said Henson. "He's not; he's the hero. The horrible pain he's put through while being forced to recognize where he's gone wrong is something everyone can relate to. Audiences always find it cathartic to watch someone go through that redemption process." And to play Scrooge, Henson chose Oscar-winning actor Michael Caine, who, like Albert Finney before him in **SCROOGE** (1970)—the only other musical adaptation of the novel—makes his singing debut vocalizing songs composed by Paul Williams.

"My singing has surprised everyone—me included," laughed Caine, the British superstar, who promised he won't be recording "MacArthur Park" now that a new career opportunity has opened up. "I've never had any lessons in my life, but I did my big number, 'When Love is Gone,' the other day and found I could come in on time and hit the right note. We pre-recorded my songs ['A Thankful



Gonzo, with sidekick Rizzo, the rat, stands in for Dickens as narrator, in a faithful retelling, not a send-up.

Heart' and 'The Love We Found' round out Caine's trio from the total eight songs] at the CTS Studio in Wembley and I'll probably post-sync them again if they want me to. That way they still might not be any good, but at least they'll be better!"

Caine jumped at the chance to appear with the Muppets despite only wrapping Russell Mulcahy's terrorism thriller **BLUE ICE** three weeks before he got the offer. "Every one of my friends appeared on **THE MUPPET SHOW** except me," said Caine. "And I wanted to so badly because of my daughter. However she's 19 now and more interested in discos than Muppets. But I'm doing a whole movie, so I win out in the end. The nearest I ever came was being directed by Frank Oz/Miss Piggy on **DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS**."

Caine said he wasn't "your average Scrooge. I'm the one character who must adhere to the original source material. I make no concessions to the Muppets and I play it with absolute reality. I do add a little psychopathic quality. Scrooge has 12 rats and a green frog as office clerks so he has to be a bit crazy! I've loved every second of making this movie. It's anarchic, irreverent, touching, very funny and, mark my words, will become a children's classic

HENSON'S NEW, LEAN, MEAN GREEN MACHINE

Brian Henson carries on the legacy of his late father, revitalizing the Muppets.

By Michael D. Beeler

Brian Henson, the quiet, boyish, chain-smoking, unconventional CEO and president of Jim Henson Productions, Inc. (JHP, Inc.), is a real gadget nut. Like his father, the late Jim Henson, who created the Muppets, and characters in *SESAME STREET*, *FRAGGLE ROCK* and *DINOSAURS*, Brian loves playing

Longtime Henson puppeteer Dave Goelz helps Kevin Clash manipulate Baby Sinclair, filming *DINOSAURS*.

with things. His office at Raleigh Studios in Hollywood, which has been in a constant state of redecorating for the last year and a half, is filled with toys, games, puzzles and brightly colored stuff, a reflection of a true puppeteer who delights in exploring, problem solving, laughing and bringing inanimate things to life.

But Brian is also very much a producer, director and businessman in charge of an international entertainment production company with offices in Los Angeles, New York and London. And along with a handful of executives and a small army of puppeteers, he has begun building upon the Muppet Empire that he acquired when his father died suddenly on May 16, 1990 of complications from a streptococcal infection.

In a move that is being watched closely by many in the entertainment industry, JHP, Inc. has launched an aggressive, multimedia, mass-marketing blitzkrieg of productions and products they hope will establish them as the "premier provider of family entertainment programming to the world marketplace."

Instrumental in Henson's expansion has been chief operating officer Charlie Rivkin, a Harvard MBA who came to



Like father, like son: Henson directs Gonzo and Rizzo on the set of *THE MUPPETS CHRISTMAS CAROL*, in London, playing with toys and having a good time at it.

JHP, Inc. by way of Solomon Brothers, a real numbers guy who has systematically cut costs and improved the company's bottom line. Along with Peter Schube, a sharp, fast-talking, transplanted New York lawyer who loves to bang on a toy drum set in his office, Rivkin struck some very impressive deals for JHP, Inc. in production, merchandising and licensing.

Although a year and a half ago Henson Productions was having some difficulty pitching their ideas to studios and networks, today their slate of productions is packed and the future looks very bright, thanks largely to Alex Rockwell, their energetic, wild-haired vice

president of creative affairs. At the beginning of 1992, JHP, Inc. was working on 12 television series, six television specials, two miniseries and 11 feature films, all in various stages of development.

- *THE MUPPETS CHRISTMAS CAROL*, originally to be a television movie special in 1991 for ABC, will be released theatrically this holiday season by Walt Disney.

- *INTO THE WOODS*, being produced with Storyline Productions for Columbia Pictures. Adapting the Tony Award-winning musical by Stephen Sondheim (*WEST SIDE STORY*) is the screenwriting team of Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel (*CITY*

DOG CITY, Henson's new TV series on the Fox Network, a combination of Muppetry and cartoon animation, a co-production with Canada's Nelvana Studios.



SLICKERS).

- **PINOCCHIO**, the first ever live-action version of the classic children's tale. Henson will co-produce with Francis Ford Coppola from a script by playwright Frank Galetti, a professor at Chicago's Northwestern University who co-wrote **THE ACCIDENTAL TOURIST** with Lawrence Kasdan.

- **PESTS**, a series about the romping adventures of a bunch of mischievous cockroaches sharing a New York flat with a human. A pilot has been written by Jim Cruickshank and James Orr. And although negotiations are not final, it will probably go to NBC.

- **DOG CITY**, which bowed this fall on the Fox syndicated network, is the first series to combine live-action Muppet puppetry with animation. It is being co-produced with Nelvana, a Canadian animation company.

- **LILI**, a remake of the '50s love story set in a traveling puppet show troupe, in development with Ron Bass, the author of **RAINMAN** and **SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY**, a candidate to script.

- **BORGEL**, the simple story of a 110-year-old Jewish time traveler, his talking dog and their sojourn to find the Great Popsicle. Originally planned as a backdoor pilot for HBO for Thanksgiving 1992, the script is being reworked.

- **GOREY ISLAND**, an eccentric black comedy/drama series inspired by the wickedly, delightful work of Edward Gorey.

And recent multi-million-dollar worldwide licensing deals in publishing, distribution and merchandising have bolstered Henson's bottom line. But JHP has also encountered some recent setbacks. The Muppets' shorts on **GOOD MORNING AMERICA** got canceled after only ten spots were produced. **DINOSAURS** failed to be the runaway hit Henson and producer Disney hoped for. And in February of 1992, after the script and production schedule was set for **THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL**, a youth monitor study on trends of the '90s (Yankelovich) revealed that Gonzo, the main character in the movie, was the least liked of all the Muppets. □

C A I N E ' S S C R O O G E

“I make no concessions to the Muppets. I play it with absolute reality. It's anarchic, irreverent and very funny. Mark my words, it'll become a perennial children's classic.”



Scrooge confronts the Ghost of Christmas Future. Noted Caine of director Brian Henson, "He could direct a good horror movie. The eerie stuff is extraordinary."

repeated every Christmas from now on."

What has surprised Caine the most is how he's reacted to the Muppets as real people. "I thought it would be difficult to block out the puppeteers, but it has been very easy," he said. "I'm sure the rest of the crew must have thought I was off my bleeding rocker when they caught me swearing at the characters and not the operators!"

According to Henson, the company's filmmaking philosophy is "into live-time. Nothing is pre-recorded or computer programmed—apart from Waldo in **THE MUPPET 3-D MOVIE** shown at Disney World—because we will always be performance-friendly." To deal with the staggering technical changes that occur on an almost weekly basis in the visual effects industry, Henson hired Paul Gentry as **THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL**'s visual effects supervisor. While Gentry admitted most of the 90 effects to be found in the film are "basically conventional, fairly simple to achieve," some nevertheless do break new ground thanks to creative input from the London-based Computer Film Company (CFC).

CFC came into the picture to solve some matting headaches. "There's a scene where some penguins are skating on ice," said Gentry. "You'd normally do this blue screen in real time or by stop-motion animation on a Go-motion system. But in this instance we had the Muppeteers dressed in day-glo green suits against a green backdrop because CFC are able to key on almost any color as a matting element. And keying on both elements at the same time with their computer system gave us a very acceptable non-funky matte, indeed."

But what happens when mattes of Kermit the *green* frog are needed? Said Gentry, "The Muppeteers wear blue suits instead! There's a Muppet first in this picture. Kermit appears in the distance and comes toward the camera dancing down a street with the Tiny Tim frog on his shoulder. This was done by rod puppetry while CFC composited a softened, sharpened and layered full-frame track on the street set. It's a very convincing effect. We used blue suits for shots of the Ghost of Christmas Present too as he has a green wreath around his head."

A pleasant surprise for Caine

was how much Brian Henson's direction helped his performance. Noted Caine, "Henson's a wonder. I had no idea he'd never directed before. I just assumed he'd done some of the other movies. But he knows direction from the human point-of-view as much as from the Muppet one and has taken me from A to Z exploring Dickens' greatest character. You know something, Brian could direct a really good horror movie. The eerie stuff in this is just extraordinary."

Said Henson about his directing debut, "My greatest strength as a director obviously comes from my Muppeteer background. I know what they can do and can give them a situation where they are able to perform to the best of their ability. That's why I needed someone like Michael Caine in the central role. He's one of the finest and most experienced actors in the world. He's so natural he hardly has to think about it. And he can change his performance level at a whim. Technical things you never normally ask of an actor he's done a lot of here. He can't walk here because he'll fall into a Muppeteer hole. He can't lean this way because the Muppeteer will show. Hitting precise marks, cheating eyelines, counting out seconds in his head and knowing where the camera is at all times—Caine makes it look effortless. I couldn't have asked for a more ideal Scrooge."

Henson could have asked for more shooting time than the tight nine-week schedule allowed him by the budget—one estimated by crew members at roughly \$15 million. Despite often working seven days a week, with an intense post-production period ahead of him to meet a December 25 worldwide opening, Henson noted, "This was my chance to show off. To see if I could efficiently produce a high-quality, high-production-value, theatrical film on a schedule closer to what one of our television programs are made on. So far, so good. We made stylistic choices very early on which have been well sustained throughout the shooting so I've never once felt we were cutting corners in any artistic area." □

WILDER

Pyrokinesis, singing firemen and effects

By Dan Scapperotti

Glenn Gordon Caron, the creator of TV's *MOONLIGHTING*, makes his feature film directing debut on *WILDER NAPALM*, the story of pyrokinetic brothers, played by Dennis Quaid and Arliss Howard (*MEN DON'T LEAVE*), who fall for the same girl, the lovely Debra Winger. TriStar Pictures plans to open the film early in 1993.

"It's not *FIRESTARTER*," warned Caron. "Fundamentally, it's a comedy. But there's a lot of ache in it and obviously a lot of special effects. There's a group of singing firemen who do three or four musical numbers. It's a very unusual film and not easily pigeon-holed."

The film's unusual title stems from the name of the brother played by Howard—Wilder—and the stage name taken by Quaid—Dr. Napalm—as he becomes a television sensation on the talk show circuit, exploiting his firestarting abilities. The screenplay is by Vince Gilligan, and Caron noted how he was struck by the



Caron directs Debra Winger as the girl caught at the apex of a pyrokinetic love triangle, in *WILDER NAPALM*, opening early next year. Caron's last film was *CLEAN AND SOBER*.

fresh nature of Gilligan's vision.

"It was unlike anything I've ever read before," said Caron. "Vince's voice is so unique. That's what drew me to it because at the end of the day, it's not about pyrokinesis. It's a very emotional film about things that tear us apart, as families, as husbands and wives, and brother from brother. The wildest napalm of all, I

think, is love and that's really sort of what the movie is about. It is, in a lot of ways, almost closer to a fable or a parable in tone. I think that's what drew Debra Winger and Dennis Quaid to the film as well."

The script is Gilligan's first. "It's very much Vince's movie," said Caron. "One of the great joys of working with him is that he writes almost purely instinctively. A lot of the kinds of construction and scene-making that you see in Hollywood films was not present at all here. He truly writes from some place deep inside, and doesn't interpret in any way."

Gilligan's script asks whether pyrokinetic powers are a blessing or a curse? That's the dilemma that has plagued the Foudroyant boys for years. The brothers, Wilder (Arliss Howard) and Wallace (Dennis Quaid), have the frightening mental ability to start fires through thought alone. As children they saw their powers could be deadly when they set a kid's club house on fire. Someone died. Since then they have sworn never to use their power

again.

Years later, Wilder works in a photo booth in a shopping center that clearly has seen better days. He sits alone in his booth all day long with few customers. It's a safe job and Wilder likes it that way. He has constructed his life so that he never really has to deal with anything. His wife, Vida (Debra Winger), whom both brothers love, is a convicted arsonist under house arrest who wears a manacle with a built-in alarm around her ankle which goes off whenever she leaves the perimeter of their home. Wallace, after giving up his job as a carnival clown to exploit his fiery talent as Dr. Napalm, returns home, hoping that maybe this time Vida will make the right choice.

Caron noted that both Winger and Quaid were naturals for their parts and not difficult to cast. "The hardest role to cast was that of Wilder because the character is an extremely reactive one," said Caron. "Typically, in American movies, we don't grow actors. We don't look to actors to be reactive. We don't look to them to be passive. We look to them to be active. So the typical roster of film stars did not fall into place for this role. I had seen Arliss Howard in *MEN DON'T LEAVE* and I was very taken with his performance. Then I did my homework and saw him in Kubrick's *FULL METAL JACKET*."

Caron's first choice for the role of Rex, Wallace's carney friend, was Jim Varney or Ernest fame. Recalled Caron, "I thought right away, 'Wow! Wouldn't it be great if I could get Jim Varney to do this?' I absolutely didn't think that he'd do it because—why should he? He had a very successful career playing Ernest and here

Winger and Arliss Howard, who plays Wilder, who has vowed never to use his awesome power because of his complicity in the death of a childhood friend.



NAPALM

from the auteur of TV's MOONLIGHTING.

he's not the star of the movie. But we called and he said he'd love to do it."

The film's blazing pyrotechnics were created by special effects coordinator Allen Hall, who has worked on such films as POPEYE, CAT PEOPLE and recently, BACKDRAFT. Hall realized the on-stage effects for a duel by fire between Wilder and Wallace over Vida's affections. At first Wilder, torn between anger and his pledge never to use his terrible power, refuses to fight back. But Wallace loses his temper and starts to radiate heat, burning the grass on the lawn between them and forcing Wilder back into his trailer home. The rivets pop out of the trailer from the heat. Wilder escapes and the brothers engage in a firefight underneath the trailer, throwing fireballs at each other until one hits a propane tank and the trailer explodes.

"Allen Hall did live special effects whenever possible so that when things blew up, they really blew up," said Caron. "There are a number of sequences where the actors are actually involved with real fire." In addition, 107 optical effects shots were supervised by Harrison Ellenshaw of Buena Vista Optical, who did DICK TRACY.

"We used a combination of three kinds of elements to create the effects," said Caron. "You have mechanical live effects, live fire. You have interactive light to simulate the light of the effect you're going to put in optically. Obviously it's impossible to throw real fireballs at actors and then go for take two. What we'd actually do was throw a light, which would simulate the light of the fireball. That light became something of a template with which to match the optical later. And you have the complicated optical effects.

"It's not FIRESTARTER," said director Glenn Gordon Caron. "It's fundamentally a comedy, but with a lot of ache in it, an unusual film that's not easily pigeonholed."



Dennis Quaid as Wallace, one of two pyrokinetic brothers in love with Winger, who returns home after fame as a TV talk show celebrity known as "Dr. Napalm."

In some cases, we had ten layers of film merged into one shot, as well as things like sky replacement and blue-screen work."

Ellenshaw and the effects crew were called upon to create some wild visuals, according to the director. "The movie is very fanciful," said Caron. "In some places we actually created environments which don't exist. There is a sequence that

I'm fond of where Wallace is feeling particularly low and he goes back to the carnival ferris wheel and asks Jim Varney to take him to the top. There's a beautiful matte glass painting by Harrison Ellenshaw of a village beneath Dennis. We pull back from Dennis on the ferris wheel and you see the ferris wheel in the distance. It's almost like a multiplane animation shot. Trees come into

the frame and you don't quite know where you're going. Then you realize you're coming through the molding of a window, and you see a hand on the window. You see the reflection of Debra Winger's face on the glass and this little dot of the ferris wheel in the distance. We keep pulling back and you see that she's in the trailer and there's an ironing board behind her. The shirt on the ironing board is burning. My hope is when you see the movie, outside of the fireballs, you won't notice the optical effects."

Caron shot WILDER NAPALM in Florida on two primary locations: in Lakeland, the setting for the trailer scenes, and Sanford, the setting for the shopping center and carnival scenes. One of the more fanciful and spectacular sequences takes place on a miniature golf course called Puttasaurus which took seven weeks to construct only to be burned to the ground by the filmmakers. The theme of the golf course, envisioned by production designer John Muto, who worked on NIGHT OF THE COMET and HOME ALONE, is dinosaurs.

On such a big film, Caron noted that his greatest concern was keeping sight of the film's direction. "I had to keep reminding myself we were making a picture about people," said Caron. "I needed to constantly keep that in mind to strike the right balance. It's a very emotional movie. It's about feelings and things that separate us as families and the things that bring us together. The power of love and most of all the power of forgiveness. What it's really about is accepting who we are and celebrating who we are—the things that make us different. The things that we think make us freakish are really the things that we should cherish." □

SAM RAIMI'S EVIL DEAD III

Raimi's ARMY OF DARKNESS finally got its marching orders from Universal.

By Steve Biodrowski

The legal dispute between producer Dino De Laurentiis and Universal Pictures, holding up the release of director Sam Raimi's ARMY OF DARKNESS, was settled out of court in September. Universal now plans to open the third film in Raimi's EVIL DEAD series nationwide in mid-January. "I was never directly involved," said Raimi of the legal wrangling. "I concentrated on making the film, which was its own battle. But the fact that the two sponsors of the picture were at war affected me, because we were denied funds, and we weren't allowed to screen the picture. What I really wanted was for both sides to be worried about making the best film possible."

The legal dispute actually had little to do with ARMY OF DARKNESS, which became a pawn in the legal fight between Universal and De Laurentiis over the sequel rights to SILENCE OF THE LAMBS. Universal chairman Tom Pollack (formerly De Laurentiis' lawyer during the days of his now-defunct DEG) claimed to have made an oral agreement with De Laurentiis for the sequel in January 1991, before SILENCE OF THE LAMBS was even released. When De Laurentiis needed an additional \$350,000 to make ARMY OF DARKNESS, Pollack asked for their agreement to be formalized into a



Raimi directs his army of the dead, puppet effects by the KNB Efx Group.

written contract, but the independent producer declined. When De Laurentiis failed to deliver ARMY OF DARKNESS to Universal on March 27 last year, the contracted delivery date, Universal claimed the delay relieved them of their obligation to accept and pay for the film, which had been independently financed by De Laurentiis through bank loans.

What went unmentioned in the trade papers covering the story is that the increase in the ARMY OF DARKNESS budget and schedule was to film a sequence that Universal specifically requested: a prologue recapitulating Ash's trip to the backwoods cabin with his girlfriend (now played by Bridget Fonda), showing how he was transported back in time. "Uni-

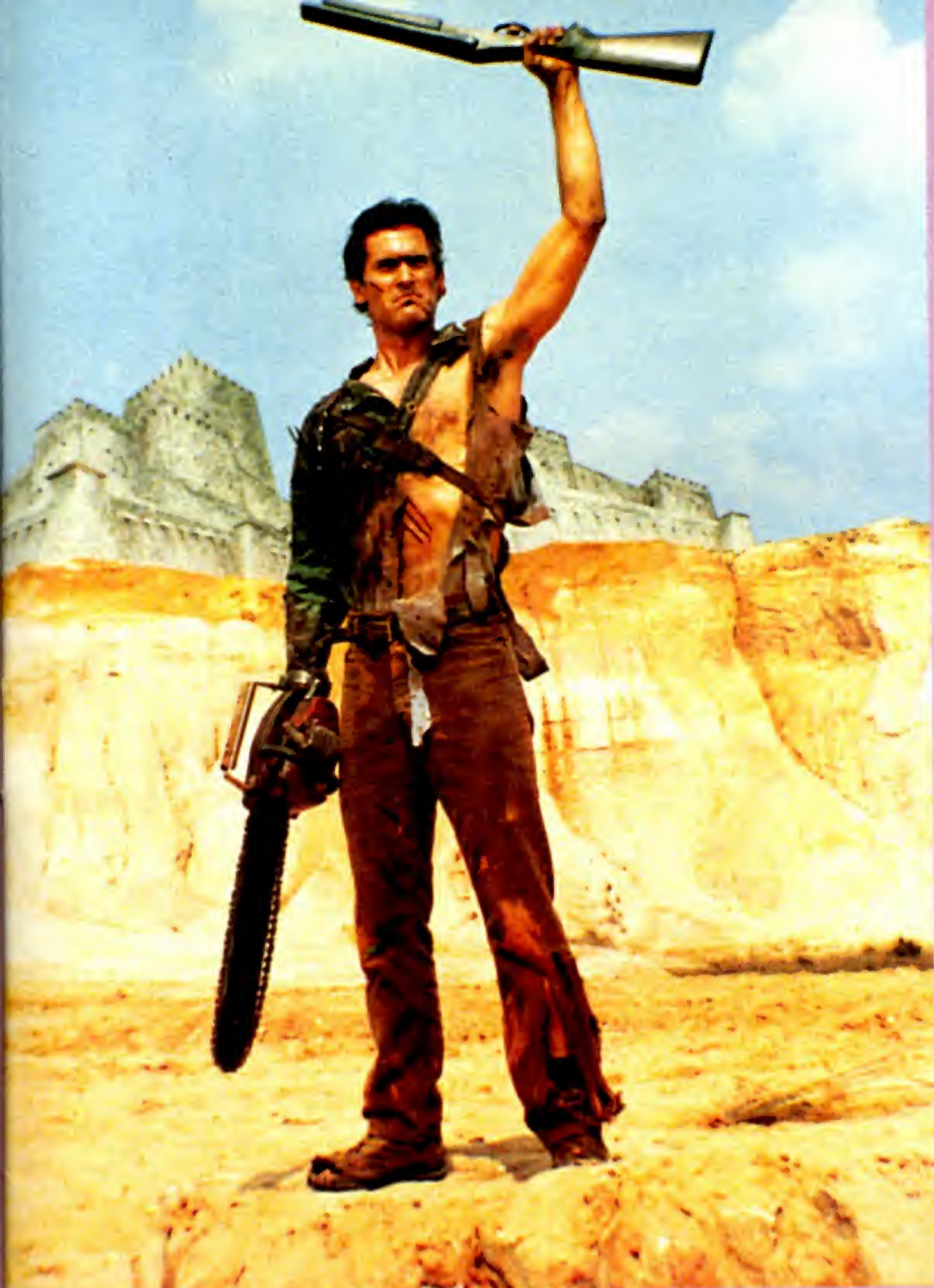
versal wanted a new beginning and fewer flashbacks from EVIL DEADs I and II, although we weren't budgeted for it," according to Raimi. "We said, 'Okay, but you've got to give us the money to shoot it.' I believe that's the [disputed] \$350,000. They still want more of it now, I believe, basically for new audiences. Very few people have seen the first two—just sickos like yourself."

Raimi noted the \$3 million figure mentioned in our October issue (23:2/3:28) is incorrect. In the midst of the dispute, Raimi and his filmmaking partners, actor Bruce Campbell and producer Rob Tapert, had to come up with the money on their own to finish filming. "We coughed up our own

money to finish the thing," said Raimi. "Which is fine—that's how independent pictures work. And Universal stuck to their contract about providing Dino with so much money for the delivery." As part of the settlement Universal also won the right of first negotiation for any SILENCE OF THE LAMBS sequel that Laurentiis might make.

Raimi noted he still hoped to do more filming. "Sometimes I shot a sequence that didn't work, so I want to shoot a bridge to cut around it: two shots here, a shot there," said Raimi. "I'm hoping Universal will cough green for these other scenes to improve the quality of the picture. I want them to be visually interesting, not just band-aids to get from A to C. And one or two of the effects didn't work as well as I thought they would. We did a lot of new and different stuff. I think it was a good gamble, but when you make that gamble, sometimes tails comes up, and you think, 'The reason no one ever tried this before is it's a lousy idea!'"

Meanwhile, Raimi said he was trying to remain philosophical about the delay, which at least got his film mentioned in the trades for several months. "I guess I should look on the bright side," he laughed. "Any publicity is good publicity!" With Universal now actively planning its distribution campaign, Raimi at last has the chance to fine-tune his



Bruce Campbell as Ash, the penultimate shot of Raimi's *EVIL DEAD II*, stranding the monster fighter in the 13th century, the plot set up for *ARMY OF DARKNESS*.

movie, although the test screening process was somewhat complicated by his previous commitment to go to Canada and play a small role for fellow director and friend Mike Binder (*CROSSING THE BRIDGE*) in *TAMAKWA*, a film about summer camp. "They're going to wait on the final cut until I return in October," said Raimi. "At that time, I'm hoping for a final screening before locking down the final version in November."

So far, audience screenings have alleviated, if only partly, one of Raimi's worries: that audiences would reject lead character Ash for being too big an imbecile. "That's still a big concern," Raimi admitted. "I don't know how much I can tell from one screening I didn't even attend, but apparently the audience accepted Bruce for every ounce of imbecile he had to deliver!"

Other concerns come from Universal executives,

who want the film to be accessible to audiences unfamiliar with the previous *EVIL DEAD* films. "Rob, Bruce and I really made this film for however few people had seen *EVIL DEAD I* and *II*," said Raimi. "Universal wants us to explain a little bit more in the beginning about what happened in those movies—which I can understand. I'm hoping Universal liked the show enough to give us money

Raimi directs Campbell, outfitted with an appropriately medieval prosthetic for the hand he cut off and fitted with a chainsaw in Part II. The sequel opens in January.



to finish up the shooting we wanted to do. I've heard they're positive about it, whatever that means. I've been led to believe, though no one's really made a commitment to me, that Tom Pollock will give us money for additional shooting."

The need for additional shooting is ironic in light of the fact that Raimi is also eager to cut out footage in order to bring the film down to a 90-minute running time. "The footage we'd shoot would probably amount to a minute total, and we're talking about cutting out five or six minutes," said Raimi. "Ideally, I would like to have the ability of the old film masters who shot exactly what they needed, but I don't have that ability. It's only through watching the audience reaction that I finally really know what works."

Raimi noted he doesn't use preview cards to test his films. "They're artificial," he said. "I believe in listening to the audience and just feeling when they like something. When it becomes a clinical study, it loses its magic, but you can absolutely feel when it isn't working—it really hurts! That's why screening is a very good process for me; I only get hurt once or twice before improving the picture in some way."

Another big concern is the film's twist ending, which might be seen almost as a reversal of *EVIL DEAD II*'s unpredictable denouement. "I'm not sure Universal's happy with that," said Raimi. "It's kind of a bleak ending. Ash just didn't realize he had a good thing going. He actually found love, and he gave it up to return to the world of MacDonalds



Campbell splits into Ash and Evil Ash in *ARMY OF DARKNESS*, makeup effects supervised by Tony Gardner.

and K-Mart. Universal wants a brighter [ending]. I said, 'Come on, guys, it's an *EVIL DEAD* film!' I like the main character, the idiot, being screwed at the end—I really do! I'm not sure they have the same opinion. So the ending may change, but I won't know until October."

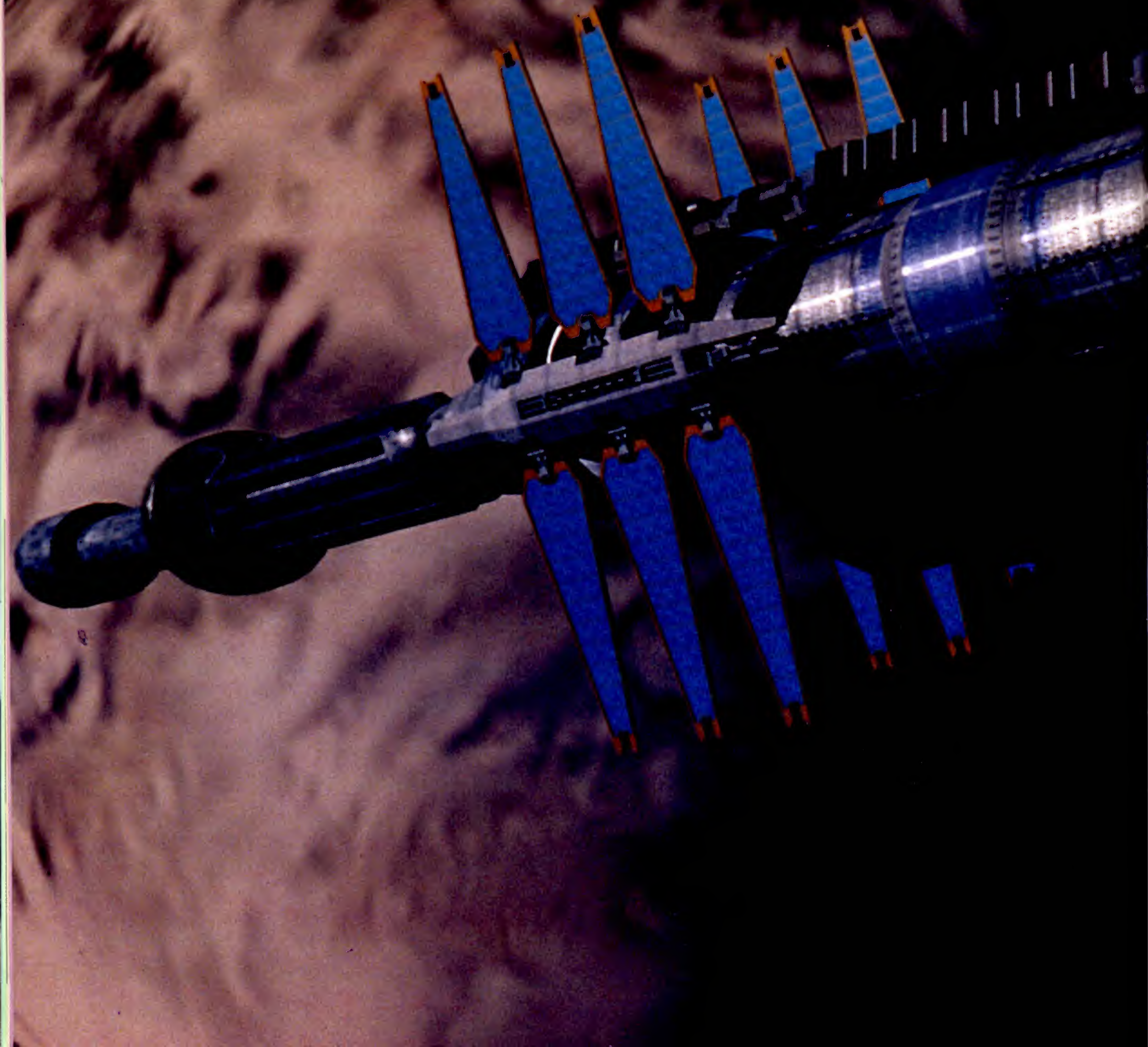
After completing his acting stint, Raimi plans to finish a script with his brother Ivan for a proposed science fiction television series. Raimi's next planned directing stint will be *THE GOLD OF GALDEAS*, scripted by Desmond McConnell. So far Raimi's Western Renaissance Productions group has no plans for an *ARMY OF DARKNESS II* or *EVIL DEAD IV*. "I'm not sure the audience is going to like this one," fretted

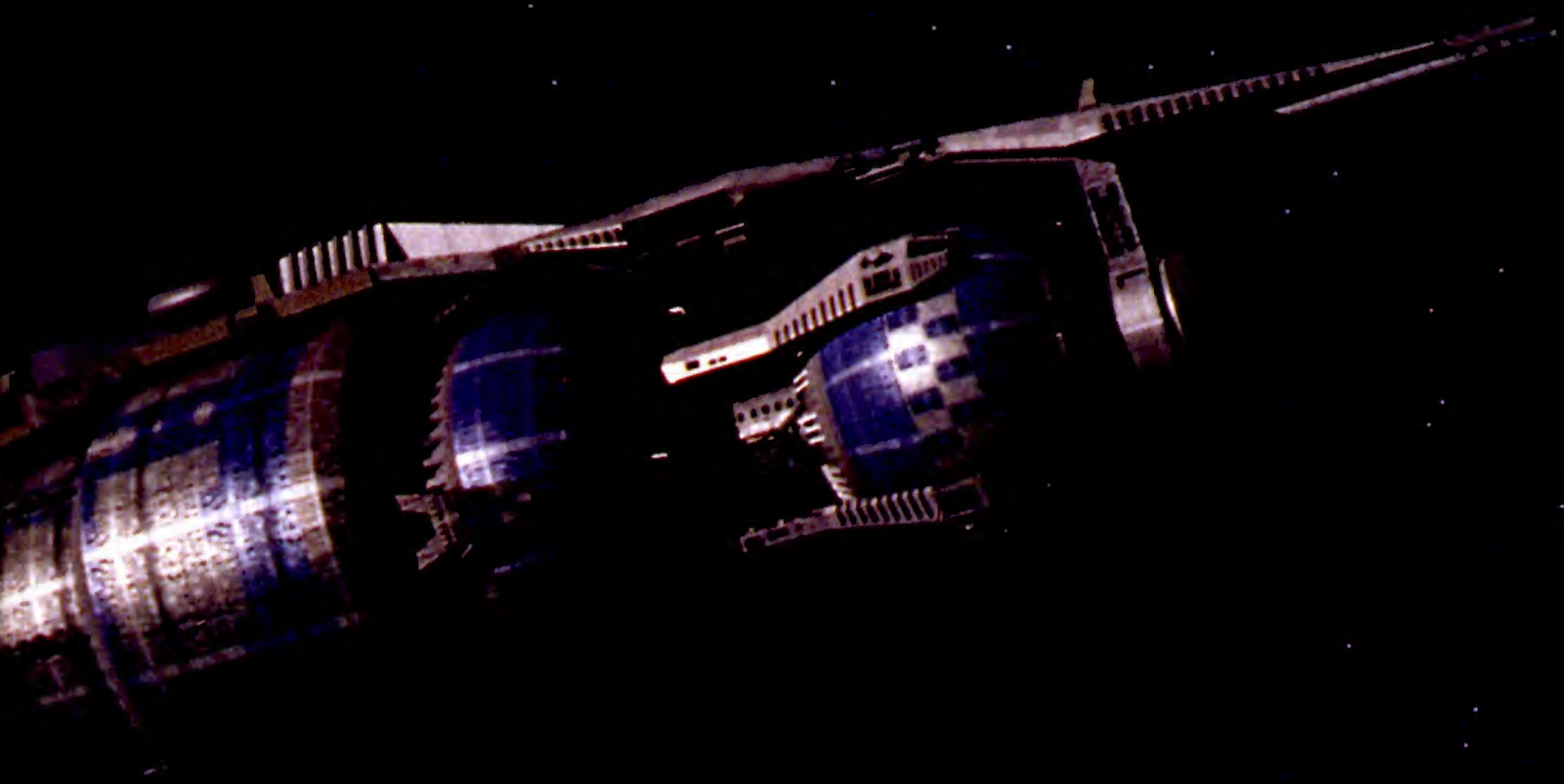
Raimi. "I never know if they like the *EVIL DEAD* films. They never do good boxoffice domestically. I just have to wait until it comes out on video a year later and see if people seem to like it. I believe it will probably appeal to the same small crowd as the first two.

"They're not really movies about making money," continued Raimi. "They're more about . . . I don't know what they're about! I really don't! They're just weird pictures that make some audiences have a good time." □

5 BABYLON 5

THE SERIES OUT TO CHANGE THE SHAPE OF SCIENCE FICTION ON TELEVISION





Babylon 5, a six-mile-long interstellar space station, the setting of an ambitious series pilot to debut on Warner Bros "fifth network" of syndicated TV fare in February. The two-hour TV movie features state-of-the-art computer graphics effects created by Valencia-based Foundation Imaging.



By Mark A. Altman

Early promotional spots for the upcoming Warner Bros telefilm, *BABYLON 5*, set on a massive interstellar space station, sported the tagline "Beyond the Final Frontier Lies *BABYLON 5*." Obviously, series creator Joe Straczynski has no fear about invading the first-run universe that *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION* has held firmly in its grasp for the last five years. The project has been Straczynski's personal five-year mission—to get his long-gestating science fiction Frankenstein onto the airwaves. This February Straczynski's concept comes alive as Warner Bros launches a "fifth network" of syndicated TV fare.

BABYLON 5 is a two-hour science fiction telefilm pilot which will be broadcast on independent stations. Buoyed by the support of subsidiary Chris-Craft's affiliated channels, Warner's Prime Time Network will launch in 1993 in nearly 80% of the country. If *BABYLON 5*'s pilot, "The Gathering," is successful, the Prime Time Network will pick up the show with an order for 22 series episodes.

5 BABYLON 5

PRIME TIME NETWORK

Science fiction plays a big role in Warner Bros' syndicated fifth network.

By Mark A. Altman

Warner Bros' Prime Time Network, a loose consortium of independent television stations covering over 80% of the country is intent on remedying the dearth of science fiction programming on television. PTN begins airing original programming this January, including the science fiction/action adventure series **TIME TRAX** (see page 44) and a two-hour space opera, "The Gathering," the pilot for **BABYLON 5**.

The idea to form PTN grew out of a desire by Warner Bros "to control its own destiny," according to Greg Maday, VP of domestic programming for the studio. Faced with the impending expansion of networks into producing their own programming, the expected repeal of the television syndication rules, and eroding episodic commitments by the networks, the studio, in partnership with Chris-Craft/United Television, formed its own "fifth network," which will begin airing original programming on Wednesday nights in January. The decision to rely heavily on science fiction shows grew out of a desire to counterprogram traditional network fare.

"There are two things that stood out very clearly when you say we're going against what you find on the networks," said Maday. "First we saw there was very little male-oriented programming in terms of the hour show. The other thing that you don't generally see on the networks is science fiction. To find alternative programming that will attract the male audience, and hopefully have some female appeal, you look for the genres which are not being capitalized on, and science fiction is one of those genres."

Another important consideration, of course, was the ground-breaking success of **STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION** in first-run syndication, which has led not only to Warner's entry into the science fiction field but other contenders such as **HIGH-**

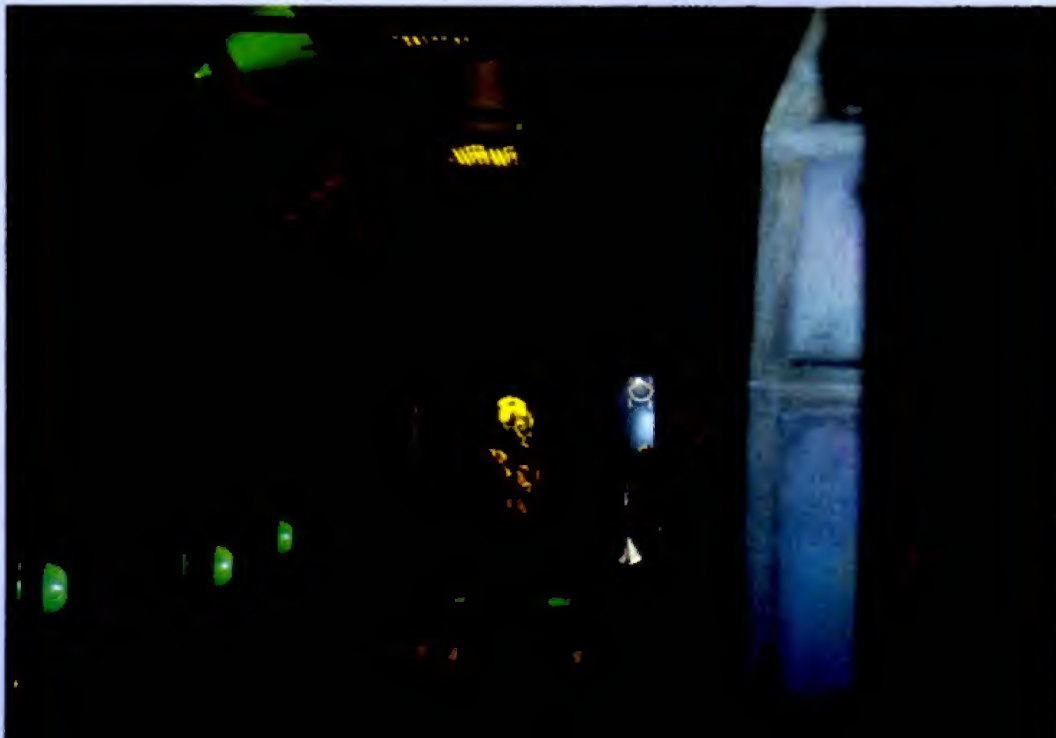
LANDER and CBS' **SPACE RANGERS**. Maday is quick to point out, however, that **STAR TREK**'s success was unique, based on being a recognizable property, and that its ratings bonanza does not necessarily assure interest in other genre programming.

"We feel that we've done things differently," said Maday. "We haven't spent a lot of money on big staffs. We haven't spent a lot of money on big casts; Paramount has. We're not doing it on the [studio] lot; they are. We know what the difference between doing something on the backlot in Los Angeles is and doing it in Canada or Australia. Our goal is that the production values that we put on the screen will be competitive and that the programming will look good and feel good. Our other objective is, in a very difficult economic climate, to see if we can't make programming at a reduced cost and still do it well."

The average Prime Time Network show, (which also includes **KUNG FU: THE LEGEND STILL LIVES** supervised by former **NEXT GENERATION** producer Maurice Hurley), is filmed at an average cost of about \$700,000 while Paramount's big-budget first-run syndie efforts (including **THE NEXT GENERATION**, **DEEP SPACE NINE** and **THE UNTOUCHABLES**) average nearly \$1.5 million per episode.

Unlike Paramount's offerings, Warner Bros' fare will be offered on a strictly barter basis, which means independent

The pilot's elaborate alien makeups by Criswell Productions. Chris Stacy in prosthetics by Rob Sherwood talks to Edwin Roseau in Asao Gotto's Fishman suit.



Andreas Katsulas as G'Kar, the ambassador of the Nam Confederacy, one of the warring factions stationed on Babylon 5 in a quest for galactic peace.

stations relinquish advertising time to PTN as opposed to paying for the programming outright. Paramount requires cash and barter for its offerings. "There is no cash being exchanged," said Maday. "Warner Bros is basically writing the check for all production. It's important to make the shows work in the first year. We have nothing to leverage. We can't say unless you take **DEEP SPACE NINE**, watch out, you may not have **STAR TREK**."

What Warners is doing, however, is requiring a 22-episode commitment from its consortium of independent stations, allowing time to amortize their costs over a longer run and, if the programs fail, they still have a chance to syndicate the repeats on cable.

How did Maday react to **BABYLON 5** creator Joe Straczynski's assertion that Warners will pick up the pilot for a series commitment as long as it's "delivered on time and in focus?" Maday didn't make such an iron-clad assurance. "I know that's their hope," said Maday. "But by contract our stations are not in a position to renew or take on new programming until July of 1993. That would be for January of 1994 broadcast. That's the way the deal has been structured. I don't think it's a slam dunk even if the show works." □

"Someone called this the STAR TREK grudge show," said Straczynski, who refined his vision of the future during the close to five years it took to get BABYLON 5 on the air. "There are a lot of creative, involved and interested people in science fiction who couldn't do it over there and are coming over here."

The new STAR TREK is disparaged by most of the crew of BABYLON 5, who all hope it will be the little space station that could. The jibes are less the result of sincere dislike for the rival series, than an attempt to motivate the BABYLON 5 production team by creating a perceived competition. Few of the science fiction fans on the crew actively dislike the Paramount first-run series, but find it a valuable target when marshaling their limited resources in a common cause to topple the genre's TV champ.

The fact that BABYLON 5 has had the benefit of a prolonged start-up has allowed the staff the luxury of extensive preproduction time, enabling them to avoid many of the pitfalls facing genre projects whose cost overruns often spiral out of control, resulting in early cancellation.

In addition, Straczynski, who has written the show's bible, pilot script and many of the planned early episodes, knows exactly where the series is headed over its anticipated five-year run. "We have planned out the stories and sets and the characters," said Straczynski, who also serves as a writer/producer on the popular MURDER SHE WROTE. "THE NEXT GENERATION does not have the preparation time. They get the script four days before. They can't budget or prepare. Here we have the chance to plan out every detail. I know what's going to happen in every episode. I know that in six months we'll need this set and it'll be a helluva set because they've had six months to think about it. We're using one stage, but it

"Someone called this the STAR TREK grudge show. There are a lot of creative people in science fiction who couldn't do it there."

- Creator Joe Straczynski -



Commander Sinclair (Michael O'Hare), who runs the Babylon 5 station for the Earth Alliance, with Lyta (Patricia Talman), a telepathic Psi Corps agent.

will expand to two stages. The ship's central corridor alone is 120 feet long."

Joining Straczynski in an informal capacity in shaping BABYLON 5 is science fiction author Harlan Ellison, who will serve as a creative consultant on the series. "Beyond that we'll go to the best and the brightest science fiction authors we can get our hands on," said Straczynski. "If Norman Spinrad wants to go off over there in the TREK format, you can't do it, but here you can, and we can back them up with the visuals. Consider David Gerrold or Bill Gibson or D.C. Fontana, who also wants to write for the show, or Richard Matheson or George Clayton Johnson and there are no set rules. Do what you want; we'll give you an arena. Here's a premise; go fly with it. You give them the freedom, you'll get those kind of

writers."

One aspect of the show that Straczynski promises will differentiate BABYLON 5 from STAR TREK and others is the fact that the characters and the universe they inhabit are far from utopian. In fact, the world of the future is very much like the one we inhabit today except that it's populated by denizens from several alien empires and features previously unseen futuristic technology.

"In the STAR TREK universe, we've overcome everything," said Straczynski. "The policy among the writers of that series is that the characters can have no inner doubts or flaws or fears. I think the process of overcoming is more interesting than having overcome. It is more dramatically interesting. These are characters who are trying to get along."

"The whole premise of BABYLON 5 is: we've got Eastern Europe and East L.A. falling apart and we're trying to learn, as Rodney King said, to get along. The premise of BABYLON 5 is: if you can get along with someone with five arms and six limbs, you can get along with the guy next door. We have to find some way to cooperate."

Helping Straczynski to visualize his future world is visual effects supervisor Ron Thornton, who is responsible for the pilot's state-of-the-art special effects, a revolution in computer-generated imagery. Eschewing for the most part the use of miniatures and motion-control cameras, visual effects for the series are created using an elaborate system of Amiga computers, IBMs and Video Toasters.

"I was brought up in the generation that grew up on FIREBALL, XL-5, STINGRAY, THUNDERBIRDS, LOST IN SPACE and, of course, Dan Dare," said Thornton, an Englishman. "I've never worked on anything like this in my life. It's really



Commander Sinclair

Commander Jeffrey Sinclair runs *Babylon 5* for the Earth Alliance, a role played by Michael O'Hare. A war hero who single-handedly repelled an attack on the Earth by the Minbari, Sinclair has an enigmatic history.

O'Hare is an admirer of another heroic figure on the science fiction scene. "I think Patrick Stewart is a marvelous actor," said O'Hare. "There's enough room to watch both shows. The competition is something created by the different syndication organizations."



The Earth Alliance

The Earth Alliance built and administers the *Babylon 5* station to promote interstellar peace and understanding. Above and below, designer Ted Haigh's symbol for the alliance and its command structure.



Command Rank



Technical Corps



Security Officer



Medical Officer

BABYLON 5

CREATING THE SERIES

Writer/producer J. Michael Straczynski explores science fiction's full potential.

By Mark A. Altman

Unlike the producers of most genre television shows, **BABYLON 5** creator J. Michael Straczynski, a former journalist, is a long-time science fiction fan whose credits include story editing **THE NEW TWILIGHT ZONE** and **CAPTAIN POWER**, as well as such mainstream shows as **JAKE & THE FATMAN** and currently **MURDER, SHE WROTE**. With Warner Bros set to air Straczynski's ambitious pilot during the 1993 February sweeps, the writer-producer seems poised to take on the mantle of the late Gene Roddenberry as the kind of popularizer who could bring a more literate brand of science fiction to mass audiences.

As the co-host of L.A.'s popular science fiction radio talk show, *Hour 25*, Straczynski's familiar refrain has been that—except for Roddenberry's **STAR TREK**—television hasn't done justice to science fiction. "Our unofficial motto on **BABYLON 5** is 'No cute kids or robots . . . ever,'" said Straczynski.

As a fan of the movie classic **CASABLANCA**, in **BABYLON 5** Straczynski sought to envision its 23rd-century equivalent in space in the form of the six-mile-long interplanetary station of the title. Noted Straczynski, "I thought of a freeport like Spain in the 14th century, where you have ships coming in from all over the world with



Straczynski, the next Gene Roddenberry, popularizing a more literate brand of SF.

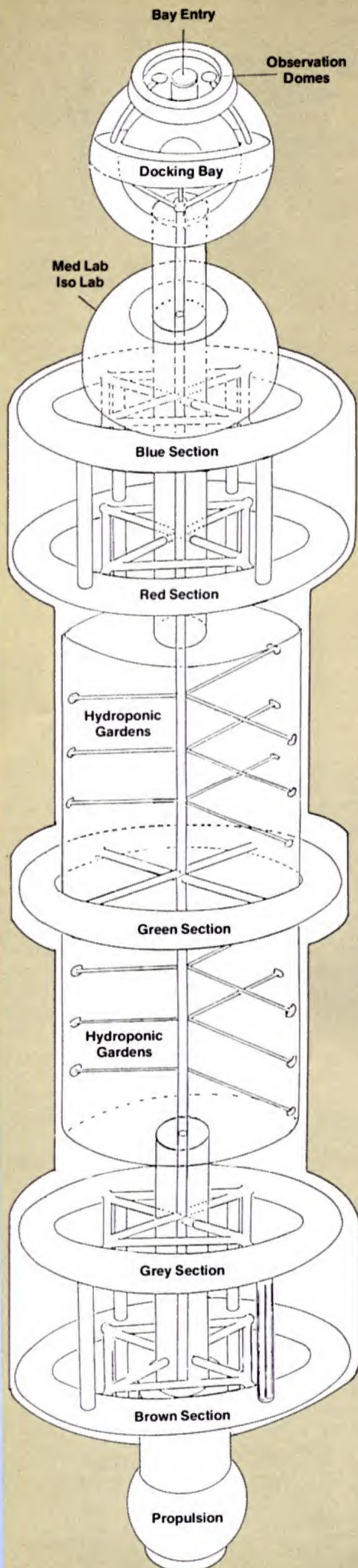
refugees, diplomats, businessmen and slave traders. Where they all converged would be that kind of environment."

Breakthroughs in computer graphics have allowed Straczynski to paint the show with a broad canvas, yet keep it economical by television standards. "We have software that doesn't exist anywhere else," said Straczynski. "We are one year ahead of Lucas in our computer stuff. It's a madman concoction of Amigas and IBMs hot-wired together with laser disc recorders and it has the power of a Cray in rendering. It's much faster than traditional means. When you can get that, the possibilities for what the show can do are limitless and can visually expand in an incredible fashion."

But the bottom line for Straczynski is that the main reason science fiction has been so poor on television is that producers have been illiterate in the field. "They don't know it and they don't want to know it," said Straczynski. "They often view the genre with creative contempt."

"The other reason is that science fiction is mired in the '60s. It's like cop shows a long time before **HILL STREET BLUES** came along. We're the good guys, whether it's the *Enterprise* or the *Galactica* crew. There's not that much latitude you have in a show like that. Drama has progressed in television since the '60s and science fiction on television hasn't caught up with that. I think if you merge those two aspects, a science fiction premise combined with the characterization and depth of **HILL STREET BLUES** or **L.A. LAW**—that kind of writing—then you've got something."

And Straczynski thinks he's got it. As for the future, if the pilot is picked up for series production, Straczynski promised the show will not only look great, but also be unlike any other science fiction show that's ever been on television. "We're going to play with people's minds a lot," said Straczynski. "We'll have the action of the old **STAR TREK**, the characters of **HILL STREET BLUES** and the surreal parts of **THE PRISONER**—that's our show." □



Graphic artist Ted Haigh's schematic of Straczynski's Babylon 5 station, six miles long from its rear propulsion jets to docking bay nose. The ship's five-ringed sections are connected by a central core shuttle: blue for political officialdom; red for business; green for luxury accommodations; grey for exotic alien environments; and brown for slums and brothels.

unique. We're not being that well paid but you just want to do something that's really cool once in a while. I think people get pissed-off with seeing too much pap on television. There's a lot of it about. Certainly in the past it's happened. You don't ask someone without a sense of humor to write a comedy show for you. Yet people will ask writers who don't know a damn thing about science fiction to write a science fiction show. I've never understood that. But since when has Hollywood been logical?"

BABYLON 5 graphic artist Ted Haigh agreed that science fiction projects have been quantitatively bankrupt on television except for STAR TREK, a classic, which he hopes BABYLON 5 will supersede. "I love STAR TREK," said Haigh. "I love the series. We just want a slightly different tack. The genre is either Larry Niven-esque—totally science-related science fiction—or it's something where you can substitute the word dog for robot and it's hardly science fiction at all. The future is intrinsic to the plot here, but the people are the most important aspect of the show and as such its been compared to ST. ELSEWHERE or HILL STREET BLUES in terms of the shooting and editorial styles."

Straczynski envisions a saga for television which will be traditionally episodic but have a longer story arc that becomes an epic canvass to be filled in during the course of the proposed series run. "The show's been in development for over four years and there are over 200 pages written by me for the five-year storyline," said Straczynski. "What's important about the show is that each episode must stand individually—but if you put it together, a much larger story emerges and it builds towards that storyline. I know what happens in any given episode in any of the seasons. I know what the last

“You don't ask writers without a sense of humor to write comedy. Why ask writers who don't know the genre to do science fiction.”

— Fx chief Ron Thornton —



Commander Sinclair and Security Chief Garibaldi walk the red main corridor, the show's only standing set which can be redressed for any section of the ship.

scene in the last episode in year five is going to be. I loved TWIN PEAKS desperately, but the problem was, if you missed one show you were screwed. We want to set up things that pay off down the road but aren't so obscure you can't follow the show anymore."

The story of BABYLON 5 follows Captain Sinclair, who played a mysterious role in saving the earth from destruction during an attack by the Minbari, aliens now party to an uneasy peace. Sinclair is charged with running *Babylon 5*, the fifth in a series of space stations, designed to play host to a series of galactic ambassadors representing the major warring alliances: the Earth Alliance, the Minbari, the Centauri, the Vorlon and the Narn Confederacy.

As such, *Babylon 5* serves as an intergalactic League of Nations, but more than that, as a catalyst for a vast array of

stories involving treachery, humor, intrigue, espionage and romance. To create a rich tapestry, Straczynski pointed to several of his favorite texts as thematic, if not narrative inspiration.

"In terms of the characters, what's always appealed to me are sagas like *Lord of the Rings* and the *Foundation* books where one person's destiny affects countless others," said Straczynski. "In this story, Sinclair has a destiny. Something happened to him during the war. One of the three ambassadors is there for an enigmatic reason—some say he is there to be Sinclair's friend. Some say he is there to kill him. Some say both. One of the ambassadors is watching Sinclair. If he goes one way, he's to help him; if he goes another way, he's to kill him. If he goes the right way, there's a much broader tapestry. Sinclair's existence is one of the reasons the war was stopped. There is something that was known about him that caused the Minbari to halt their attacks. They

perceived disaster, if they continued. They're watching him and if he doesn't develop the way they think, the war's back on. All bets are off."

In "The Gathering," Captain Sinclair is accused of poisoning the last ambassador to arrive on the station from the mysterious Vorlon regime, an act which could result in intergalactic war. Among other questions Straczynski raises in the pilot that he promises to answer in the show's first season are the mystery of Captain Sinclair's blackout while defending the earth, leading to a Minbari surrender and what the alien Vorlons look like underneath their environmental encounter suits.

Ironically, the seed from which BABYLON 5 sprang was a short-lived science fiction television show, CAPTAIN POWER & THE SOLDIERS OF THE FU-



Garibaldi

If MOONLIGHTING's David Addison found himself aboard a space station, it's likely he'd be using Michael Garibaldi as an alias. The wisecracking and irreverent Garibaldi, played by acting newcomer Jerry Doyle, who bears a striking resemblance to Bruce Willis, has screwed up one too many times.

"I describe him as a nice, funnier, more talented Bruce Willis," said Blaire Barron, who plays cargo ship commander Carolyn Sykes. "His resume is all lies—he has Dance Theatre of Harlem on it! Jerry's such a gambler. He gets away with murder, fraud, whatever."

LONDO

Look, you're a security chief. Shouldn't you be out... securing something?

GARIBALDI

I am. I'm securing you. The new ambassador got here early. Commander wants to make sure you'll be in the welcoming party.



Defending The Earth

In a last-ditch effort to avoid conquest, the Earth Alliance used its remaining ships to form a defensive line around the planet, facing a final attack from overwhelming Minbari forces. Illustrator Ted Haigh's uniform patch commemorates veterans of the encounter.

Sinclair was a hero of the battle, in which the Minbari surrendered and sued for peace. But why have the events of that crucial period been blocked from his memory?



Laurel Takishima

For Tamilyn Tomita, who portrays *Babylon 5*'s second-in-command, Laurel Takishima, the Lt. commander is a far cry from the stereotypical female role. It's a welcome change.

"It appealed to me very much," said Tomita, who was discovered by director Alan Parker and cast in *COME SEE THE PARADISE*. "When we're in dress uniform, you'll see that Laurel has the most medals and badges because she kicked the most ass. It's a very strong role, and that's the direction I wanted to take it, rather than be a simpering, victimized woman. She's first an officer who happens to be a woman. There's a danger of going over the edge. But she's not a bitch."

Welcome to Babylon 5

CUSTOMS SECTOR

FOLLOW ALL CUSTOMS PROCEDURES.

SEE MONITORS FOR DETAILS

TIME ON B-5 IS EARTH MEAN TIME (EMT)

MONETARY EXCHANGE RATES THROUGH BUSINESS CENTRAL NET

COMMUNICATIONS COURTESY OF BABCOM A GALACTEL MATRIX

BABYLON 5 IS ADMINISTERED BY THE EARTH ALLIANCE

Clearing Customs

The docking bay of the *Babylon 5* station includes a customs area where visitors are searched for contraband, including the fashionable drug of the future, "dust," as well as weapons and other proscribed items. Sign by illustrator Ted Haigh.

In the teaser to the series' pilot, a smuggler attempts to bring "dust" on board and is caught by security. The smuggler is played by Billy Hayes, the real-life narcotics courier who was imprisoned in Turkey, personified by Brad Davis in *MIDNIGHT EXPRESS*.

TURE. Straczynski blamed producer and *MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE* director Gary Goddard for the show's inane *SOLDIER OF THE FUTURE* title. Through stigmatized as a kid's show because of its affiliation with Mattel to sell a toy line, the series boasted some mature science fiction themes and impressive low-budget visuals. Straczynski, who served as the series' story editor, met *BABYLON 5* producer Doug Netter while working on the earlier series.

"We never intended *CAPTAIN POWER* for children," said Netter. "We intended it for a more adult audience, but we could never overcome the fact that television stations would really be interested in only clearing early morning and weekend time periods because Mattel was involved. We have geared *BABYLON 5* for an adult, prime-time audience. We pinpointed the general audience as teenagers and families."

Unlike *CAPTAIN POWER*'s Mattel honchos who deluged writers with story notes and ultimatums, which were almost always ignored, Prime Time Network executives have been reticent in their suggestions for *BABYLON 5*. "There's no network to worry about per se and Warner Bros has not had a single story note," said Straczynski. "They've said, 'Go and shoot.' I'm astonished by the lack of interference."

The one aspect of production Warner Bros was concerned about throughout the pilot's five-week shoot was the budget, pegged at under \$3 million by industry trade publications. It's the only subject that Straczynski was reluctant to discuss. Proving science fiction could be commercially viable without being a budget buster was an early impetus for the series.

"It goes back to '86 or '87, having just come off one really expensive television show,"

"There's no network to worry about per se. Warner Bros has not had a single story note. I'm astonished by the lack of interference."

- Creator Joe Straczynski -



A smuggler of "dust," the designer drug of the future, takes a hostage when caught with the forbidden substance while clearing customs on *Babylon 5*.

said Straczynski of Warner Bros concerns about *V. THE FLASH* also cost the studio a bundle with little result. "Seeing how it was run was nuts. I said, 'Why can't you come up with a show that's creatively open but yet financially responsible like *CAPTAIN POWER*?' You look at *HILL STREET BLUES* or *ST. ELSEWHERE*—what makes them interesting is you create a stable environment where you have your characters on their own turf and the stories come to them. Instead of seeking out new life every week, your story becomes about that, rather than your characters, which are never developed. This led me to the idea of a space station."

In attempting to launch the series, Netter and Straczynski tried several means of financing their ambitious production before having

it picked up by the Warner Bros consortium. "We tried to go the foreign co-production route at first, which did not pan out," said Straczynski. "Then we went to Evan Thompson, the CEO of Chris-Craft Television. It's funny when you talk to these guys. They either get it or they don't get it. He got it immediately. He said, 'Work with me. We'll get this on the air somewhere.'"

Conceded Netter, "Experience until recently with science fiction shows has been very dangerous when it comes to control of costs. Some executives we met with would immediately reject the project on the basis of cost control. There were others who said there's only a limited audience for science fiction projects. We never believed that. The hardest obstacle to overcome was cost—plus the feeling that if you do science fiction for television, the public is going to feel cheated because they don't see what they see with *STAR WARS* in a theatrical film. Many of the shows

that were done after *STAR WARS*—until now—have been shows that don't deliver the quality that a television audience wanted to see."

Ironically, after those early meetings, Straczynski and Netter took the project to a science fiction friendly studio, Paramount, future home of *DEEP SPACE NINE*, like *BABYLON 5*, set on a space station. "The development executives read the treatment, the bible, and the screenplay and saw the artwork, and they went nuts for this stuff," said Straczynski. "They said, 'We'd love to do it but we have a space show in process called *THE NEXT GENERATION*. Maybe someday we can do a show like this.' Our next stop was Warners, and Dick Robertson, a vice president there said, 'There's something coming. I can't tell you what it is yet. Don't take this to a network, work with

continued on page 27

5 BABYLON 5

FOUNDATION IMAGING

The Valencia-based effects supplier devised a low-tech, low-cost way to provide the high-tech look of CGI.

By Les Paul Robley

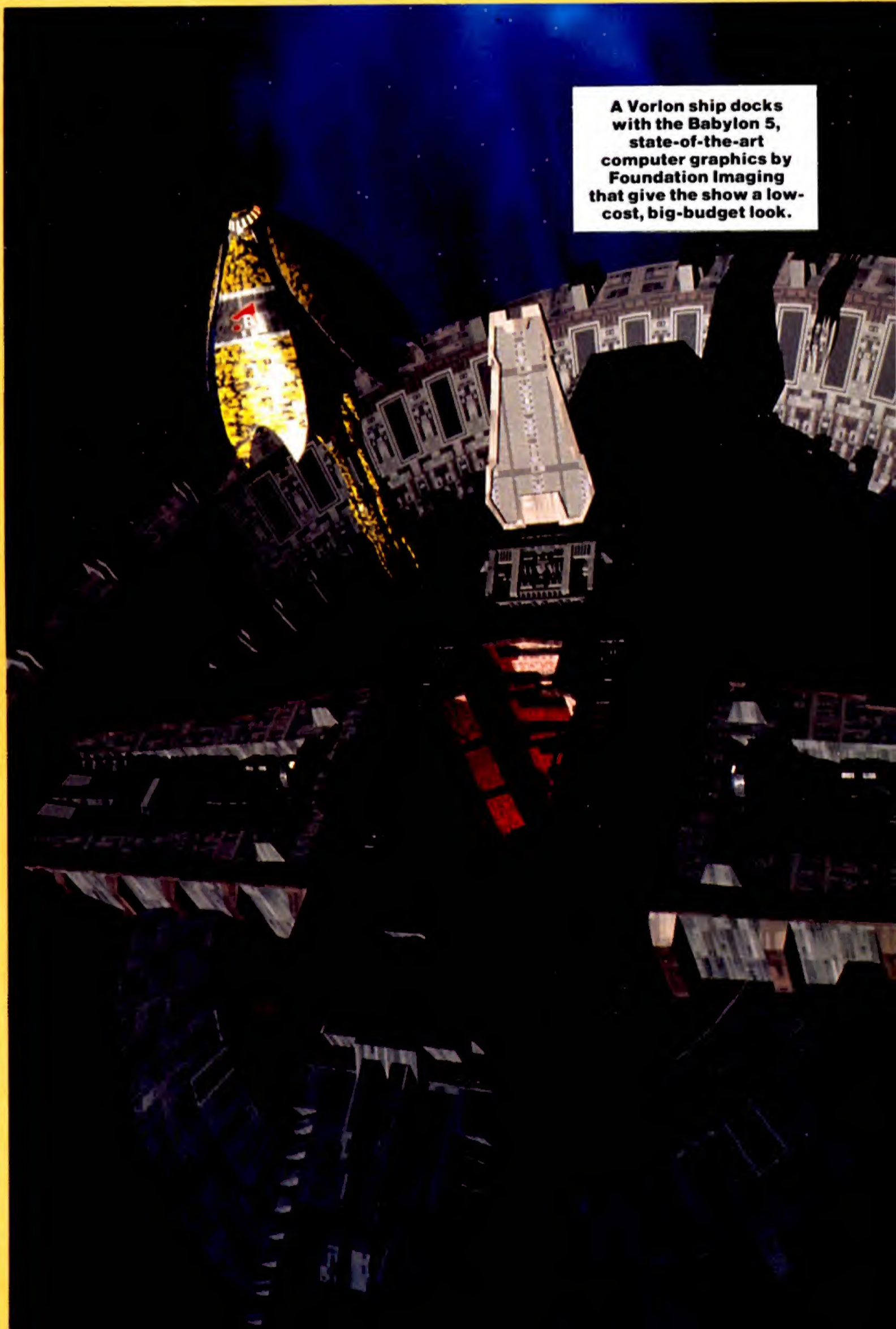
The spectacular computer graphics visual effects of BABYLON 5 are the work of Valencia-based Foundation Imaging, headed by Ron Thornton, a veteran of THE ADDAMS FAMILY, HIGHLANDER 2 and DR. WHO. Thornton's innovation was to couple the versatile 3-D graphics-rendering capabilities of the Video Toaster 2.0, manufactured by NewTek, to a network of low-cost Amiga PCs as output devices, to bring stunning, high-quality computer graphics imaging (CGI) within the grasp of low-budget productions, such as BABYLON 5.

Thornton, an Englishman, began experimenting with the Toaster in 1990, producing video images for composer Todd Rundgren, which brought him into contact with NewTek Toaster programmer Allen Hastings. "Then it was still very

much in its early stages," said Thornton. "It would've been difficult to produce a show with it." But Hastings improved the Toaster's capabilities with input from Thornton. "It's an astonishingly brilliant 3-D program," said Thornton of the Toaster 2.0. "Hastings has put in nearly everything we've asked for. Some capabilities have been pretty wild and esoteric.

He's a fan of this type of genre—he really wants to make it work."

Thornton partnered with Paul Biegle-Bryant last March to open the doors of Foundation Imaging, when BABYLON 5 got the green light from Warner Bros. "His knowledge is in creating custom networks," said Thornton. "Using standard desktop computers we render images as good as anything made off of a quarter-million dollars worth of equipment. You'd spend more than our entire effects budget on BABYLON 5, which is \$250,000, for



A Vorlon ship docks with the Babylon 5, state-of-the-art computer graphics by Foundation Imaging that give the show a low-cost, big-budget look.



Foundation Imaging network specialist Paul Biegle-Bryant.



A maintenance droid seen working on the exterior of the Babylon 5 in outer space, computer graphics by Foundation Imaging. Below: Steps in the imaging process—left, rendering the basic geometry; middle, applying surface image maps; right, the final model rendered with shadows. With computers, the sky's now the limit.



“If you bid out the job as a model, it came to a crew of six working six weeks to build the space station. I did it myself CGI in two weeks.”

- Fx chief Ron Thornton -

models of the ships are made using the Video Toaster's LightWave 3D program, manipulating the subjects in real-time so that perspective and orthogonal views can be previewed and modified. Interactive translation, rotation and scaling of objects can be adjusted with a supplied mouse. Lightwave 3D also permits the creation of detailed storyboards.

Surface detail is added by mapping polygons, the minimum units of detail used by the computer to remember surfaces. An average frame in TRON had 7,000 polygons with a peak of 15,000. THE LAST STARFIGHTER boasted 350,000 polys with peaks of over four million. By encoding one view of 3-D data into the computer, all views can be generated. Whenever there's a bilateral symmetry—such as the identical shapes found in a wing or engine part—only half of the object need be drafted.

Surface variables, including color, luminosity, highlights for simulated metallic surfaces and smooth shading can be added by texture mapping. Bump mapping can simulate waves, pitted, dented or other raised surfaces. “When creating a list of surfaces on the model, you begin assigning textures to them just like painting-by-numbers,” said Thornton. The yellow and black spottiness found on the organic Vorlon ships is generated by the Toaster using a random fractal pattern.

Much computer art of the past carried

Foundation Imaging supervisor Ron Thornton, programming a shot with the Video Toaster 2.0 by NewTek, a breakthrough in low-cost CGI technology.



one of those machines.” And if it was part of a typical graphics workstation, you could easily add another few zeros to the price!

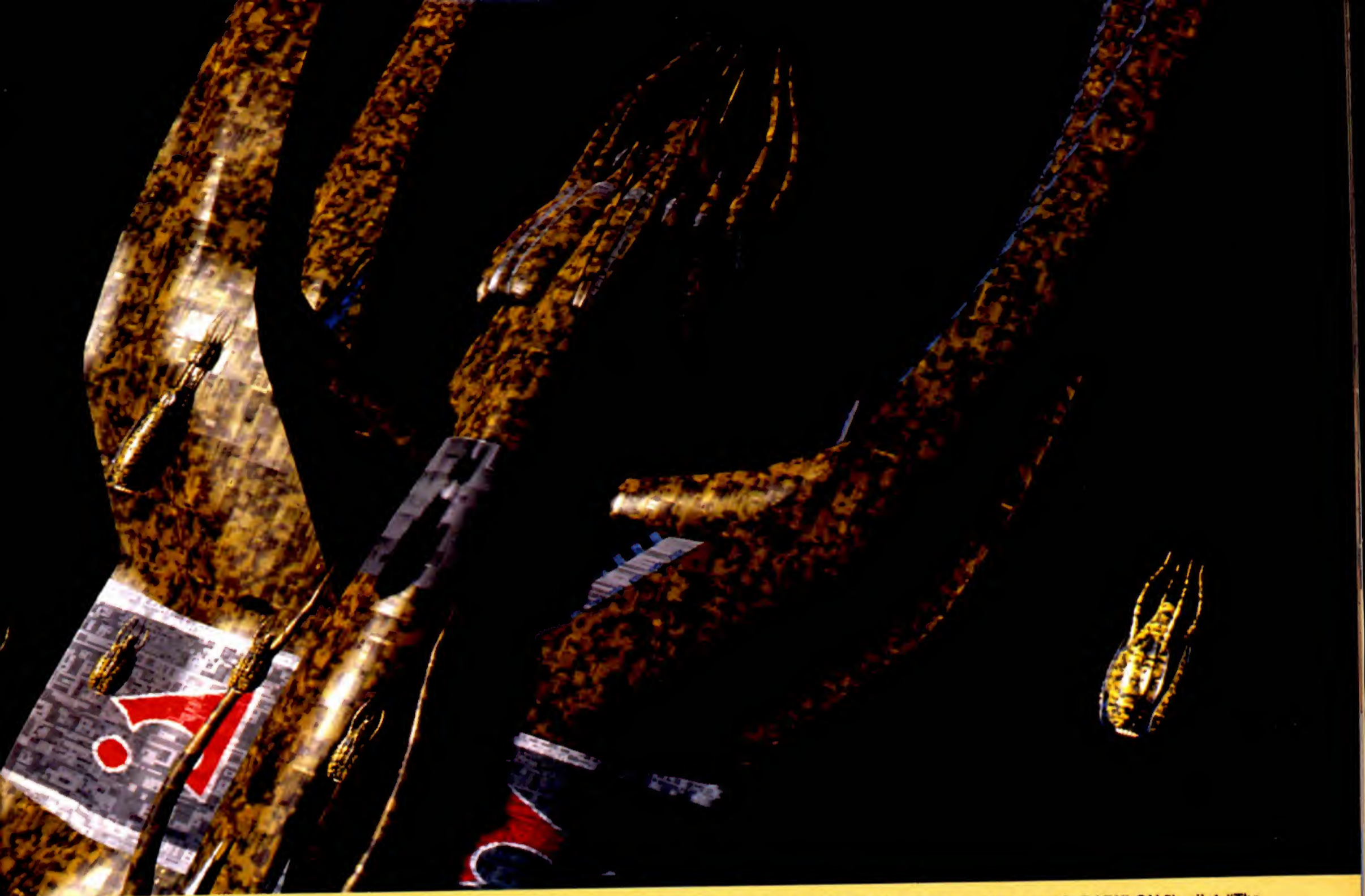
Thornton and Bryant are quick to point out that their company is not limited to producing CGI. “You can never use just one tool,” said Thornton. “You have to stay open-minded. But BABYLON 5 just stank of CG. It could easily be done. They were fairly reluctant at first to try it. I did some tests and they loved it. If you bid the job out as a model, it came to a crew of six working six weeks, plus materials, just to build this humungous space station. I did it CG myself in two weeks.”

Thornton compared the quality of the work for BABYLON 5 with that of THE LAST STARFIGHTER, a CGI ground-breaker in 1984, with images rendered by a \$115 million Cray X-MP super computer. “The kind of processing power we have today in leading-edge desktop systems doesn't get any more powerful than this,” said Thornton. “I'm quite sure that if you actually added up the amount of processing power, memory and advances in rendering algorithms that have been made in nearly ten years, you can say today's system is actually more powerful overall than the Cray. THE LAST STARFIGHTER was something for its time. We have vastly better tools than they had, at a fraction of the price.”

Foundation Imaging is producing 80 shots for the pilot of BABYLON 5, estimated by Thornton at about one-fourth the cost of filming effects with conventional means as on STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION. “We're doing at least \$1 million worth of effects,” he said. “Taking into account the complexity of the ambitious shots we're planning, they would almost be impossible to do by traditional means. We're not doing it to show off. We're doing it to allow the show's creator freedom to come up with unusual ideas.”

But Thornton credited the new STAR TREK for leading the way to video economies. “They really started to make video work by going to the Post Group to composite their miniature effects using video techniques, which cut down a lot on opticals,” said Thornton. “Shows like BUCK ROGERS and BATTLESTAR GALACTICA were comping all of this stuff to film so it became outrageously expensive. [With the Toaster] you can preview an entire shot complete with its background and camera moves, check that it's okay, render it and it's done.”

There are five fundamental steps involved in Toaster scene generation: 1) the drafting stage, 2) the lighting stage, 3) the technical direction stage, 4) the rendering stage, and 5) final compositing to tape or film. In the drafting stage wire frame



The Vorton Mothership and fleet, escorting Ambassador Kosh to his post on the Babylon 5, CGI effects by Foundation Imaging. One scene in BABYLON 5's pilot, "The Gathering," has 200 ships on screen at one time, easily beating the previous record for motion-control elements in a composite shot held by RETURN OF THE JEDI.

with it a surreal cleanliness—the new, pristine characteristics of CGI found in earlier films like TRON and THE LAST STARFIGHTER. Computers tend to render objects with a kind of sterile perfection. To counter this look, Foundation Imaging uses Toaster techniques to dent ships, adding fuel stains, burns and carbon scoring on engine exteriors in an effort to create the well-used, worn look that characterized the spacecraft in STAR WARS and ALIEN.

Once the drafting and textural process is completed, the data is stored on Digital Audio Tape (DAT) for safekeeping. The programmer can now position an object anywhere on the monitor and adjust its scale and perspective. Backgrounds are created as separate objects. For starfields, single-point polygons are generated randomly inside a sphere, encompassing the entire illusionary stage encircling the computer model. A nebula can be a simple cloud with a painted texture mapped onto it.

"Essentially speaking, what you have is a fully equipped production studio inside your monitor," said Paul Biegle-Bryant. "All the facilities are inside as well. Our set for BABYLON 5, electronically speaking

is five kilometers across. The space station has been scaled a half kilometer. You can move lights or objects anywhere within that space." The individual elements are loaded into the layout area akin to bringing miniatures and lights onto a soundstage. In effect, the programmer becomes a "mathematical cinematographer," with the computer's abstract version of "paint-by-numbers."

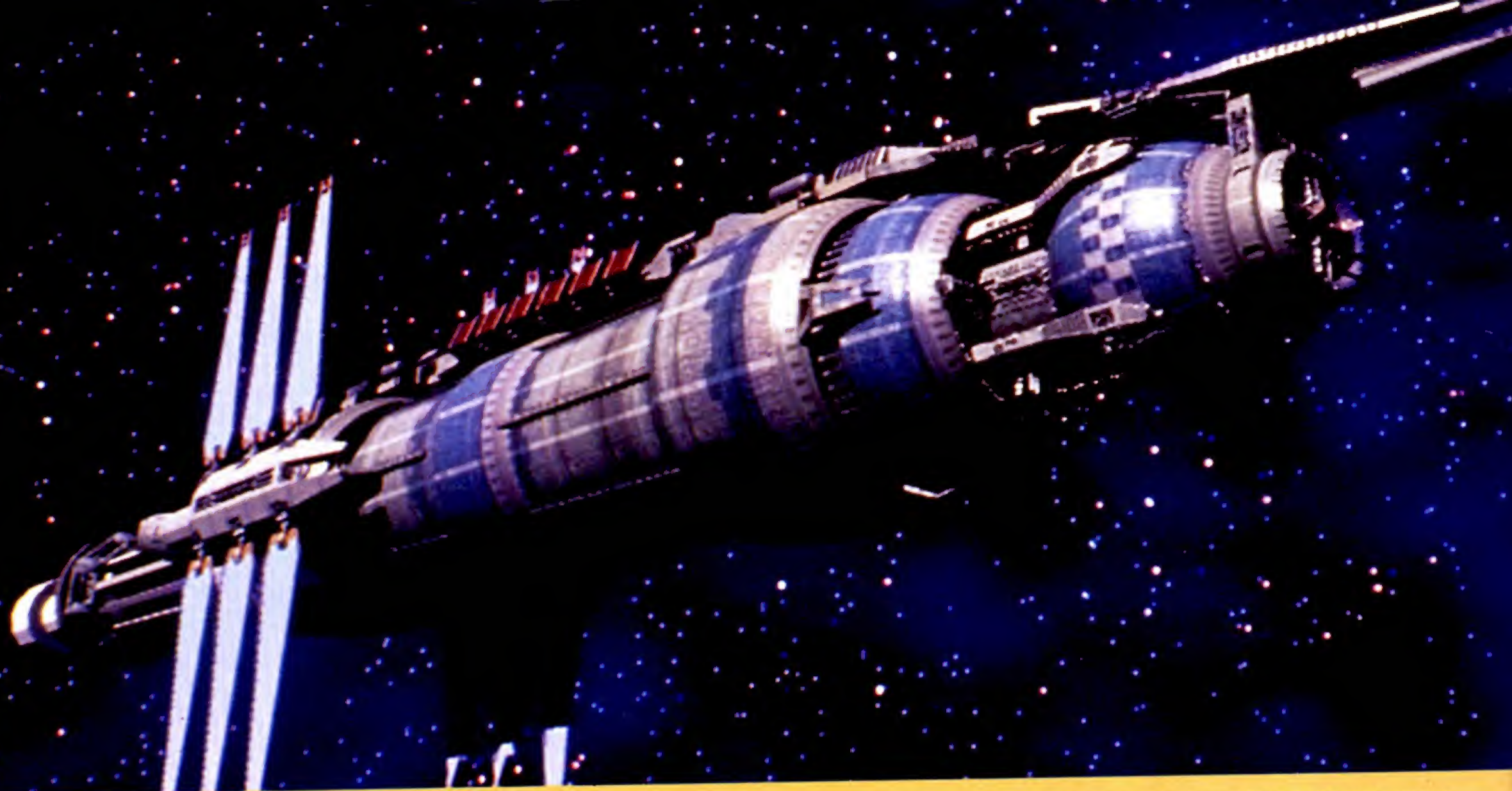
Using the Video Toaster, one lights the object with programmable lamps which are exactly the same as stage lights. Available light types include distant sources like the sun with highly parallel light beams, point sources with variable intensity fall-off, spotlights with adjustable cone angles and soft edges, or multiple colored light sources with gels and animated flickering intensities. At this stage, key frames are rendered to see how the finished product will look, so lights can be moved and ambient levels adjusted. This process is similar to exposure wedging a normal miniature shot.

The Toaster allows for accurate, ray-traced shadows, including adjustable self-casting and receiving shadow options. "It's very expensive to create shadows in terms of time," said Thornton. "If you render a frame without shadows it will take only five minutes. Our shadows tend

to go black with no ambient light levels—harsh lighting like 2001. In THE LAST STARFIGHTER, they didn't trace one shadow in the whole show. We're tracing shadows on every single shot."

Stage 3 involves the process of technical direction or animation, equivalent to programming the motion-control apparatus on a soundstage with miniatures. A mouse replaces the joystick as encoder. Previewing scenes in vector line form lets filmmakers optimize the action's choreography. The graphics can then be cut into live action to observe a scene's overall pacing. There's also more time to be creative since laborious re-shooting of miniatures is unnecessary. The need for a large labor force is virtually eliminated, decreasing production costs.

Another important benefit is the crisp, first-generation look of digital effects, with no image degradation or generation loss. The flexibility of computer simulation permits any number of elements to appear simultaneously in a scene without the need for complex matting. BABYLON 5 has one shot with as many as 200 ships on screen at one time, which easily beats the previous record for the amount of spaceship elements in a composite held by RETURN OF THE JEDI. This offers unlimited possibilities to television writ-



The Babylon 5, computer graphics rendered by Foundation Imaging using a network of low-cost Amiga home computers as output devices. With CGI, the programmer becomes a "mathematical cinematographer," choosing the lighting for a scene by using the abstract "paint-by-numbers" system of NewTek's Video Toaster technology.

ers. If you want an entire fleet to attack a station, feel free.

Step 4 is the rendering stage. Foundation's render engine is housed in an industry-standard, climate-controlled environment so its computers don't overheat from being on all the time. An array of central processing units is each connected via network to a central server, a massively huge hard disc drive with five gigabytes (thousand-millions) of storage and 64 megabytes of memory. Foundation currently has an array of eight standard Amiga computers with highspeed 68040 processors and 32 megabytes of system memory in each—all for the unattended rendering of frames in photorealistic color via parallel processing. Each Amiga carries a segment of a scene and all render that scene at the same time. Depending upon the shot complexity, the computers take about five hours to render an average 400-frame scene of about 13.5 second duration. The total time required for just one person to create any given shot is about one or two days for modeling, 45 minutes to program and put together the scene, and five hours to render it.

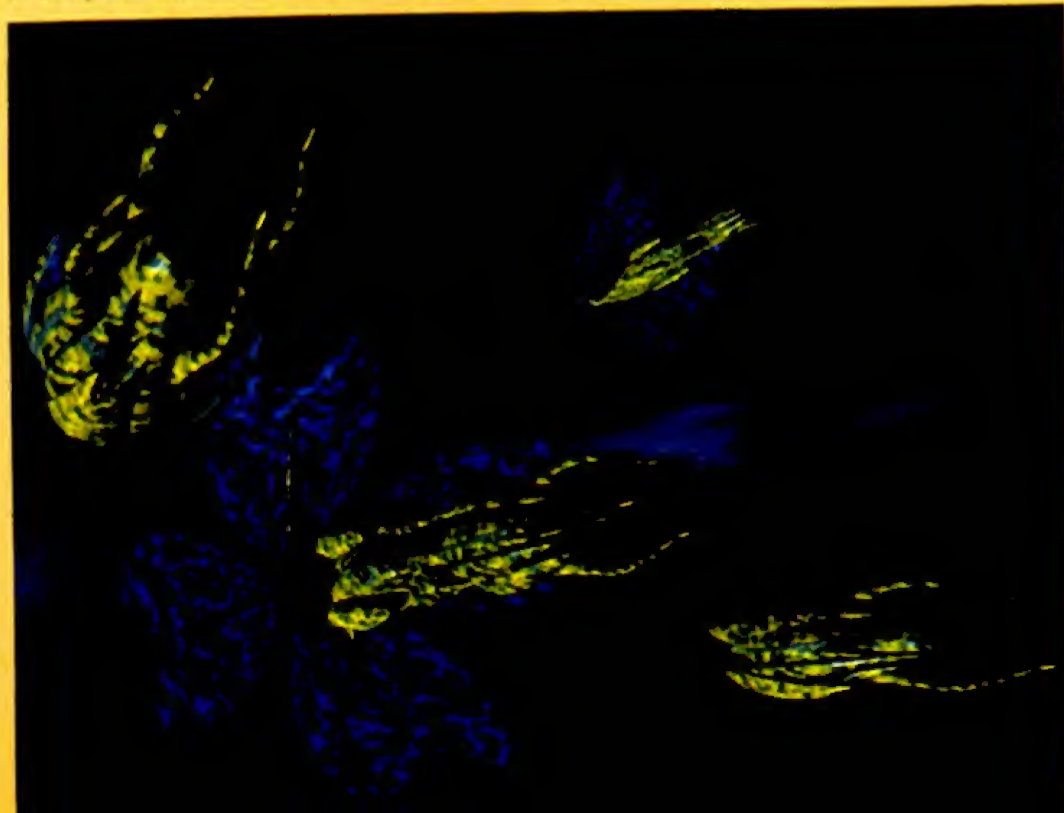
"We have more than enough power to do the show," said Bryant. "We can use just eight Amigas because that's all we need. We have space to add three more bays which would increase the processing power significantly."

At this stage, the image is ready for transfer to video. "At

the moment, the end result is going straight to video because that's what we've been required to do," said Thornton. "But there's no problem transferring to film. *THE LAWNMOWER MAN* was done to the same resolution as we're doing *B-5*, which is only TV rez. I wouldn't suggest using it in a major film where you're doing stuff to the standard of *TERMINATOR 2*. You could certainly deal with it in terms of lower-budgeted movies and create effects that would probably be as good as if you were using standard 35mm."

Other effects Foundation is designing with the Toaster call for hovering semi-autonomous recorders with cameras which follow passengers on the *BABYLON 5* station *a la* *Big Brother is Watching*. Thornton planned to combine the live action 35mm film with their CGI in post-production at the Post Group.

The Vorlon fleet, deploying an umbrella-like shield to decelerate as they come out of warp vortex, one of 80 effects shots done by Foundation at a cost of just \$250,000.



Another interesting innovative concept deals with Foundation's treatment of explosions in space. Typically, live action pyro is shot high speed and the approved explosions are scanned or "digitized" into the computer from the original negative via the frame grabber. *STAR WARS* explosions have now become cliches in their own right, and the question: "What is reality in space?" is arguable when considering Hollywood's visual anomalies (i.e. sound in a vacuum, flame exhausts, moving starfields, etc.).

"In the past, explosions in space have all been hokey and unrealistic because you don't get flame in a vacuum," said Bryant. "There are no thermal dynamics in space—the bits come straight at you." Foundation is making completely digital explosions—weightless ones designed to look exactly like NASA shots of exploding bolts when the stages of a rocket separate. "There's a very small flash and then all the tiny debris flies straight out."

Noted Thornton, "I prefer doing technical effects that have a certain amount of realism. Everybody out there who's doing computer stuff is doing floating chrome blobs and checkered landscapes—stuff like that looks like CG. After a while it gets old. It suffers from overkill and starts to lose its punch. We're not doing the typical flying and zooming in and out that you can do with CG because it pulls [viewers] away from the general pacing of the show." □

us.”

When the plans for Warners' television consortium materialized, Straczynski was offered the opportunity to prove that he could deliver a quality science fiction show on budget and on time. Despite being like a kid who's just been handed the keys to the candy store, Straczynski hasn't shirked his responsibilities for a moment. Warner Bros, reluctant to repeat their experience on *V*, their last major science fiction undertaking, which had gone wildly over budget, agreed to produce the pilot and will take a wait-and-see attitude before approving production on the series. Ironically, it was Straczynski who penned a *V* revival script which would have returned the series to the airwaves for first-run syndication. However, when budget concerns rendered the project unviable, *BABYLON 5* was picked up instead.

“If I didn't think there was enough money to do the show properly, I wouldn't do it,” said Straczynski. “I feel strongly that a big problem in television is irresponsible producers who don't know how to work within a budget. *V* is an example of where they backed into a budget which was far beyond what they possibly could have done. I wanted to try to create a show that would be economical. I believe you should be responsible with other people's money, large amounts in particular. On *MURDER SHE WROTE* my shows always came in under budget because I worked with the production crew to see what we could and couldn't do. There's a point to prove with this show. First, that we can do it within a reasonable budget and second, with amazing quality.”

Nestled in the hills of Santa Clarita, California, the cast and crew of *BABYLON 5* shot on soundstages for five

“There's a point to prove with this show. First, that we can do it within a reasonable budget and second with amazing quality.”

- Creator Joe Straczynski -



Gribaldi (Jerry Doyle) and Sinclair (Michael O'Hare), brandishing a tricorder, investigate a mysterious breach in the *Babylon 5* hull in “The Gathering.”

weeks of grueling production from mid-August to early September, filming the pilot for a series which could potentially redefine the face of science fiction on television. Boasting feature-quality production values, a diverse range of new and veteran performers and state-of-the-art visual effects, *BABYLON 5* is the first completely new exploration of the genre in space since 1978's *BATTLESTAR: GALACTICA*, a failed retread of *STAR WARS*. In the case of *BABYLON 5*, no one will confuse this original and unique vision of the future with anything that's ever aired before.

Aiding co-creator and executive producer J. Michael Straczynski in visualizing a world never before seen, except in his fertile imagination, was noted futurist Peter Ledger, who contributed preliminary materials [see artwork 23:4:17]. Veteran pro-

duction designer John Iacovelli (*HONEY I SHRUNK THE KIDS*) felt the material was helpful in determining a look for the series, which boasts sophisticated, futuristic but weathered-looking setpieces.

“Peter Ledger was a friend of Joe [Straczynski]'s and his look to the world was fairly *FLASH GORDON* and cartoony which really wasn't bad because it did land the show someplace,” said Iacovelli. “He did have some wonderful ideas, but basically he was just trying to get us locked into some look in his early sketches.”

Ledger's illustrations, coupled with Straczynski's script, served as the genesis for the world of *BABYLON 5*. Straczynski's script features extensive descriptions and exposition on technology, costumes and sets, even including a notation that a maintenance robot should look anything but “cute.”

Noted costume designer Catherine Adair of the concept of the massive interstellar space station, “If I had one image in my head it was that of Venice in the 1600s or 1700s when it was a trading port for the whole world. It was an open, free port. I put that city into the future in my head. What would it be like? That's the image I conveyed to them in my first meeting and I kept it with me. We all talked about Casablanca, Venice, Marrakesh and Jerusalem, which I've visited. I remember being fascinated by seeing the very, very old and the very, very new and everything in between. That's the sense I've had of *BABYLON 5*.”

Returning from Mexico after designing *HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS*, Iacovelli was approached by *BABYLON 5* line producer John Copeland. He wanted to know how cheaply Iacovelli felt he could put together the production design for a space-bound, science fiction series while still achieving a big-budget look.



The Main Corridor

The main corridor, the show's one standing set, can be re-dressed as the corridor that rings any one of the ship's five color-coded sections (see diagram, page 20): blue, red, green, gray or brown. Noted graphic designer Ted Haigh, “The station is like a town, with sections that correspond to everything from Park Avenue to Wall St. to Harlem.”

The Main Corridors of the *Babylon 5* station are dotted with advertising, inspired by *BLADE RUNNER*, which popularized the use of realistic displays. Haigh created the ads on a Macintosh with a Cannon 500 laser printer, transferred to a Translite transparency. Many of the ads are in-jokes. Vernachio Tours, for example, honors the pilot's art director, Dorian Vernachio.



BABYLON 5

THE OUTER SPACE CAST

A politically correct, ethnically diverse ensemble shorn of genre stereotypes.

By Mark A. Altman

One of the challenges for creator J. Michael Straczynski in bringing adult science fiction to the small screen was creating a cast of characters who were realistic and true to life so that today's viewers could relate to their personal dilemmas. Rather than the typically flawless officers seen in most science fiction programming, Straczynski offers us an ensemble of characters who, in the tradition of the finest MTM programming of the '80s such as *HILL STREET BLUES*, have a myriad of personal demons which plague them.

Commander Sinclair, who runs the *Babylon 5* station, had his mind messed with during the war with the Minbari, and he's looking to find out who did it and what they did. Sinclair is played by Michael O'Hare, a New York stage actor and graduate of the prestigious Juilliard School of Drama. O'Hare sees his role in the show in heroic terms.

"We try to make it as colloquial as possible, to keep it in the context of playing a human being who is in a heroic struggle of sorts, trying to lead, despite his own fears and doubts," said O'Hare on the set. "This is the western of today. You've got the undiscovered territory, the problems of people getting along together, dealing with basic fears. The next frontier, if you'll pardon the expression, is in space."

Sinclair's right-hand man, Security Chief Garibaldi, is

played by Jerry Doyle, a Wall Street stockbroker who only recently has broken into acting. O'Hare described Sinclair's enforcer this way: "He's gotten a bad rap for playing too loose with the rules, but he gets the job done. *BABYLON 5* is about people who have been given a bit of a bum rap, like Garibaldi, who doesn't feel he's up to it. I tell him, 'I picked you because you're the right man for the job. You're not subtle. You're not politic. Sometimes you're a pain in the ass, and I wouldn't have it any other way!'" Garibaldi also has a problem with booze.

"Who released my bio?" demanded Doyle in mock anger. "Londo's the alcoholic. Garibaldi's just a social drinker."

Neither O'Hare nor Doyle have much knowledge or connection to science fiction. Quipped Doyle, "My connection to science fiction is my mortgage." O'Hare's knowledge of the field stems primarily from helping raise a 13-year-old boy named Ben.

Japanese actress Tamilyn Tomita plays Laurel Takishima, *Babylon 5*'s second-in-command, with DeLenn (Mira Furlon), ambassador of the Minbari, Earth's foe.



The Earth alliance officers of *Babylon 5*: Johnny Sekka as Dr. Kyle (l), Michael O'Hare as Commander Sinclair and Jerry Doyle as Security Chief Garibaldi (r).

"He's my unofficial technical advisor," said O'Hare. "He loves science fiction and effects and makes his own models, builds masks and is into computer graphics. He's like [*BABYLON 5* creator] Joe [Straczynski] was when he was a young guy. I was turned on to this genre through Ben before I came to this project. As far as he's concerned, I finally got a good job."

Dr. Kyle, the chief medical officer on *BABYLON 5*, is played by Johnny Sekka, a graduate of the Academy of the Royal Dramatic Arts in England. "I have made more than 20 pilots, but none were of this calibre," said Sekka. "The writing was excellent, very intelligent. The character is a rarity for a black actor. I turned down so many things because I find them insulting.

When I read this I was thrilled and hoped I would get it."

BABYLON 5's ethnically balanced and politically correct cast also puts an Asian woman in the role of the ship's second-in-command, like *STAR TREK*, illustrating man's future ability to overcome prejudice. Tamilyn Tomita, who is Japanese, plays Lt. Commander Laurel Takishima.

"My brothers and I are huge *STAR TREK* fans," said Tomita. "Not fanatics, but we were fascinated by it because it touched upon social consciousness for us. It was the only show that represented races of different colors and presented messages of social and humanistic import. It also provided us with a good laugh, because it was so damn campy."

Most of those involved with *BABYLON 5*, fans or not, manage to come up with a jibe, sooner or later, at *STAR TREK*. Offered O'Hare, "If my arm is B-5, my fingernail is the *Enterprise* docking. How's that for a tacky cheap shot at *STAR TREK*?"

How does the cast of *BABYLON 5* feel, poised on the brink of stardom? According to Jerry Doyle there will be no problem with egos. Said Doyle, "Joe told us, if we start to cop an attitude, he'll just throw one of those alien masks on us. Then it's whoops!—out the airlock." □

"At the time, BABYLON 5 was just in a really rough treatment form," said Iacovelli. "They said if we had these sets, how much is it going to cost and we got into this whole thing of 'Can we do this?' It was always the challenge of can you do a sci-fi show for television and it doesn't turn out to be V or something like that, with an escalating budget. Even though it's not MELROSE PLACE, based on my theatre training I knew we could do it."

One reason Iacovelli waxed positive about the prospects for a science fiction series was because of his experience as a designer on CAPTAIN POWER, a show that achieved impressive visuals without an exorbitant budget. "I think it was pretty good," said Iacovelli. "I think it held together pretty well. Any show on a budget is going to show its seams eventually, especially the kind of killer budget they were on, but it was a good experience."

"One of the funny things that happened on CAPTAIN POWER was that the director turned to me during a really horrible shoot and said, 'Next up is the alien corridor.' I thought, 'Alien corridor, what is that?' I'd never heard of that set before and no one else had ever heard of it before either. It was basically just this set the director had in his mind and in about two hours we went out to the dumpster and literally glued together burger boxes and everything else onto these walls and canted them at angles. We put in a wood grate and shone light up through it, and we had this really great looking corridor."

"In an odd way, that was the genesis for BABYLON 5. I knew that if you take good principles of design and don't lock yourself into the idea of standing sets that are really solid and hard you can get by with a lot more. I'll never forget this one little corridor was the best looking thing in

"This is the western of today, dealing with basic fears. The next frontier, if you'll pardon the expression, is in outer space."

- Actor Michael O'Hare -



Shades of Odd Job, makeup artist Greg Aronowitz as the Minbari who gets fried. The makeup team often doubled as alien extras, wearing their own designs.

the show. It took two hours and we spray-painted it."

Iacovelli told Straczynski and his partners on BABYLON 5 that with the proper time to plan, costly overruns could be avoided and the show could be produced at a reasonable cost. "My problem with the way a lot of films are put together is that it's very last minute and that's what you pay for," said Iacovelli. "If you plan ahead you can save a lot of money." While formal pre-production didn't begin until five weeks before shooting, many of BABYLON 5's key players had been pre-planning for years.

Even with Iacovelli's reduced cost projections for the series, prospective distributors all balked at shelling out cash for what could potentially be an expensive science fiction series. "Every time we did a pass with different producers it was, 'Can you do it for less than that?'" recalled Iacovelli. "They

were calling up and saying, 'Can you cut another 20% out of your budget?'"

Applying the principles he had learned doing other episodic television shows, Iacovelli planned to stay away from costly standing sets. Such sets can be used through the course of a series, but take up a large amount of space and money. Instead, Iacovelli chose to rely on swing sets which could easily be redressed and rebuilt for various locales, as he had done on several sitcoms.

"I worked as an art director on THE COSBY SHOW and A DIFFERENT WORLD," said Iacovelli. "What we did, which is how a lot of television is done, is you take the same sets and you repaint them and reuse them for different things. We used a seafood restaurant on A DIFFERENT WORLD and used it as a French country restaurant on the Upper East Side of New York for COSBY. It's just like using the same basic set with different dressings."

I knew the show could work this way without having to have five soundstages of standing sets. For instance, we used three walls of the station, which are round in nature, for Sinclair's office and his ready room. The counsel chambers and the conference room are the same. We're just changing them in different ways so you don't recognize them."

Rather than present a streamlined, seamless look in his production design, Iacovelli made use of panel cuts which were dictated by both design and dollar concerns. "With panel cuts you can reconfigure sets in many different ways," said Iacovelli. "Every set got used at least three times and got painted and put together a different way. If we did these beautiful molded plastic panels and made everything seamless like STAR WARS, we would have never been able to afford it or get it done on the



Narn Ambassador G'Kar

Alien ambassador G'Kar, played by Andreas Katsulas, under three hours of makeup, represents the Narn Confederation, a race once enslaved by the Centauri, a galactic empire now in decline. G'Kar is a plotter who seeks conquest of the Centauri. "I was thrilled to see the dailies," said Katsulas, "to see it all come together, the costumes and the makeup, and coming on to Lyta."

G'KAR

We have no telepaths among my people. A genetic oversight, I suppose. One which you could help correct.

LYTA

Ambassador... I've heard about the Narn obsession with buying new technology, but you can't just buy someone's genes!

G'KAR

As the only race without telepaths, we are at a tactical disadvantage. You could change that. Now, would you prefer to be conscious or unconscious during the mating? I'd prefer you were conscious, but I don't know what your pleasure threshold is.

Andreas Katsulas, who plays G'Kar, as Tomalak, a Romulan on STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION.





Graphic Design

Graphic designer Ted Haigh, responsible for the signs, murals, ads, newspapers (above), costume insignia, I.D. cards and other details that make the world of BABYLON 5 seem real, worked under production designer John Iacovelli (see right), and consulted closely with series creator J. Michael Straczynski.

Haigh is a former sign painter from Virginia who has worked on more than thirty film projects. A science fiction fan, Haigh admires the work on STAR TREK, but sees the look of BABYLON 5 taking "another tack, more along the lines of BLADE RUNNER!" As other influences, Haigh cited the "golden age" art of science fiction illustrator Frank R. Paul and the retrohip Steampunk subgenre of William Gibson. His only other science fiction assignment has been HBO's low-budget TV movie DEADLOCK.

Haigh called BABYLON 5 the high point of his career due to the creative freedom he has been afforded in drafting his futuristic designs. "Everybody on the show is coming up with their own little spin on the universe," said Haigh. "It's a credit to the people at the top that they let us. That's one thing that's sort of marvelous about the crew in general: it's amazing how well everyone is working together."

Production designer John Iacovelli (r), graphic artist Ted Haigh, and storyboard artist Chris Muller (l).



schedule we were on."

Iacovelli got the idea for BABYLON 5's deconstructionist architectural look from a friend. "You might call it 'Frank Geary in Space,'" said Iacovelli. "What clued me in to that was looking at photographs of satellites. They look like a washing machine without its shell. They only send up what is necessary, some little extension rods, and some metal bars and some tin-foil. But there's beauty in the form and the structure. It's the idea of structure for function."

Set designer Chris Muller worked with Iacovelli to design and construct the ambitious range of sets within the designated time and budget parameters. Muller, from Brooklyn, was hired while visiting the production on vacation, with only two shirts and a pair of pants. "We're making up the rules as we go along," said Muller. "Early on we were talking about going back to early science fiction, like Jules Verne, which you see in the central corridor set. There's almost an Edwardian steel frame, as opposed to a lot of science fiction where the structure of a building is hidden and cleaned up, like in STAR WARS or STAR TREK. Here the external structure is on the inside, it's an early turn-of-the-century feeling. In contemporary architecture, deconstructionist architecture, a lot of the materials are in conflict, metal against wood. John's used a lot of raw wood, which made for an attractive and unusual look in science fiction. We are totally envisioning a world. Alien, non-human. There are no ground rules."

For Muller, whose design experience is primarily in theatre, working on an ambitious Hollywood science fiction telefilm was a dramatic change from what he was used to doing in New York. "The time frame and approach is so different," said Muller. "Something gets built and painted and dressed

“BLADE RUNNER made people realize the future isn't going to be Kelvinator refrigerator panels everywhere. That's BABYLON 5.”

- Designer John Iacovelli -



Jerry Doyle as Security Chief Garibaldi, attempting to clear Sinclair in his investigation of the death of Vorlon Ambassador Kosh, dictating tricorder notes.

in a day and explodes the next. That's the most exciting thing: watching the sets explode into fire."

Everyone on the production treated the telefilm like a feature project. The strongest influences on all aspects of the pilot's design are an array of classic science fiction films. Ironically, most of the films that inspired the show were not financially successful. Among them are Douglas Trumbull's SILENT RUNNING, OUTLAND, ALIENS and Ridley Scott's BLADE RUNNER, a film that redefined the look of science fiction.

"We've really learned from BLADE RUNNER AND BRAZIL," said production designer Iacovelli. "The problem with those films is that you almost have to have an existentialist's view of the future. While I'm not personally religious, what I

think adds a wonderful richness to our show is that these different societies have their own religions, which they don't deal with at all in STAR TREK."

Helping to reinforce the reality created by Iacovelli and his team of designers is a wide spectrum of advertising art created by graphic designer Ted Haigh for visualizing a future reality that's not too far removed from our own. In the station's pivotal central corridor, as well as on the people-mover and transport tube, advertising for human and alien products can be found dotting the walls.

"BLADE RUNNER was a primary inspiration in the degree of the reality they gave advertising art," said Haigh, a veteran of such projects as A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN and HBO's DEADLOCK. "This art could be funny without making the show itself seem slapstick. We don't mind humor. We want this to be a serious show, but we want the sense of being able to control humor so we stick it in

various places to promote the realism of the show. In the early STAR TREK series, the monitors were painted cardboard."

Adding to the unique feature quality look of the production and helping director Richard Compton achieve the look of such dark and fatalistic genre efforts as BLADE RUNNER and OUTLAND is the use of Veralights as opposed to traditional Mole-Richardson illumination. Traditional lighting on a television series requires gaffers to move bulky lights and use gels to change the brightness and tints. BABYLON 5 has instead utilized a system of lights traditionally used in rock'n'roll concerts, a computer-controlled system of moveable overhead lights which creates a unique look never before captured in a science fiction series.

"They are very theatrical,

continued on page 35

5 BABYLON 5

DESIGNING THE FUTURE

Production designer John Iacovelli strove for BLADE RUNNER's gritty realism.

By Mark A. Altman

Designing the future of BABYLON 5 is John Iacovelli, who designed Disney's impressively low-budget HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS. Iacovelli credited the look of Ridley Scott's BLADE RUNNER as the major design influence on the look of BABYLON 5.

"There was almost a paradigm shift when BLADE RUNNER came out," noted Iacovelli of the film's influence on the public perception of science fiction. "People realized that the future isn't really going to be Kelvinator refrigerator panels everywhere. That's my view of BABYLON 5, and director Richard Compton shares that view. He clued into that very early on and one of his first thoughts was that in the central corridor there should always be something that someone is fixing. There should always be a maintenance crew in the background gluing the ship back together, just like down-

town L.A. or any place in New York. I think that's what the future is about.

"We tried to give it a sense that it's not a brand-new station, that it's a bit war-torn. It's like when you get on an L10-11 or 747 and you look out the window and paint is sort of scratched off and all the plastic panels don't quite fit together. It gives a texture and richness that makes it more realistic and more accessible."

Iacovelli is also quick to point out that he feels contemporary objects need to be incorporated into any future view since history has shown that societies are fond of retaining things from their past. "In 250 years, we're not going to *not* have things we have now," he said. "That was something they've somewhat corrected in THE NEXT GENERATION. The idea that we banished all sense of our past history and don't take it wherever we go is ridiculous. If people move into space, they're going to take the



Filming green screen on the Babylon 5 core shuttle, which runs the length of the six-mile ship, with commuters subjected to the kind of advertising you'd expect.

things that are familiar to them.

"So we tried to give each of the crewmembers' quarters a very different look, one that was acceptable to either their character or their race. In Sinclair's quarters he has artifacts representing man's achievements and struggles, whether it's the war with the Narn republic, our future, or something from our own era. Maybe he has a piece of the Berlin Wall.

"For me as a designer, the important thing was to reinforce the script," continued Iacovelli. "There are a couple of ground rules that [series creator] Joe [Straczynski] set up early on that have been really helpful. One was that there were going to be no kids and no cute robots. The other was a certain kind of future technology that isn't a banishment of blinky lights and buttons, but is certainly more stealth oriented. Definitely not banks of blinking lights. We're getting away from that. It's more of a retro-future.

"I sort of laugh at the '50s and '60s view of the future where you have all this leisure time, with gadgets that do everything for you, and you work for one day and relax the other six. What has happened

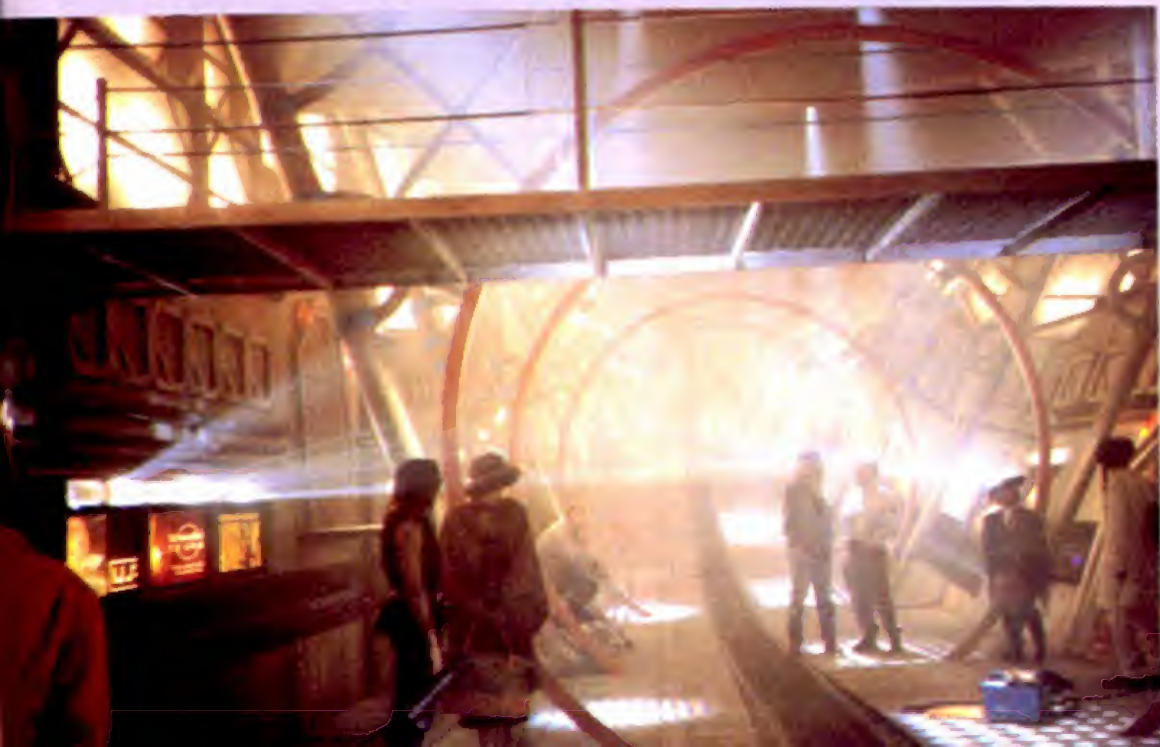
is exactly the opposite. We now work eight days a week because we can do so much more with the technology we have."

On Straczynski's instructions, Iacovelli has gladly banished the look of past science fiction shows in the design of BABYLON 5. Noted Iacovelli, "We had dressers making space junk for the alien quadrant and they had some stuff out. I had to tell them, 'None of that LOST IN SPACE look.' There's none of that look we all know as dryer hose and silver shit." □

An airlock, Babylon 5-style, design functionality and a desire to look different from other science fictions.



A future that looks lived-in, the main corridor of the station's red business ring, lined with conference rooms and shops, featuring a market bazaar and casino.



5 BABYLON 5

ALIEN MAKEUPS

Criswell Productions came up with a galaxy of economical extraterrestrials.

*By David
Ian Salter*

John Criswell, supervisor of the makeup effects and animatronics on BABYLON 5, was nowhere to be seen on the set, though many examples of his team's handiwork populated an aptly named bazaar set, where bizarre aliens sampled goods from around the galaxy. After director Richard Compton called "cut" a humanoid gorilla bartender strolled out from behind his bar and introduced himself as Criswell.

Back in the prosthesis-festooned trailer that served as on-location headquarters for Criswell Productions, makeup's amazing Criswell explained how concern for the actors' welfare often results in his crew and himself wearing their own designs on-screen. "You get on set and somebody has to wear it," he said. "It's heavy; it's hot; it becomes a nightmare." Criswell reasoned that his crew would be inspired to keep an

Makeup artist Scott Sirag in costume, in an alien concept of his own design.



Kosh, the mysterious Vorlon ambassador, suit constructed by Ron Mendell and Greg Aronowitz.

actor's comfort in mind if they knew there was a chance they might end up wearing the makeup themselves. As a result, Criswell and his crew have developed a large repertoire of tricks they say ensures that the experience of wearing one of their designs will be a relatively painless one.

Although reluctant to reveal trade secrets, Greg Aronowitz, Criswell's second-in-command, explained that all of their creature suits are designed to be large relative to the size of the person wearing the costume. "Most of the suits that you'll see on BABYLON 5 are twice the size of the person who's in them," said Aronowitz. "We never do anything that's so

form-fitting that you could die inside." Having the designers wear their own creations also saved on production costs by eliminating the need for extras.

The relatively low budget given to the makeup effects department on BABYLON 5 demanded that most of the money be put into creating the effects themselves, leaving less money for crew salaries. This led Criswell to find other, nonfinancial methods to reward his crew. "I wanted to try and give everybody an opportunity to design their own alien," said Criswell. "This way they're getting something out of it, not just a paycheck and long hours, but actually seeing something through from start to finish."

Criswell and Aronowitz first began designing creatures for BABYLON 5 in 1989. After initial consultations with creator Joe

Staczynski, they sculpted maquettes of the various alien races in the show. Then the project was shelved indefinitely. After three years of inactivity, BABYLON 5 sprang back to life early this spring. Suddenly everything was needed—yesterday. "It just exploded all at once," recalled Criswell. "It was, 'Here's the money, guys! Go! Hurry up!'"

Criswell and Aronowitz found themselves faced with the task of populating a six-mile-long space station with aliens in an almost impossibly small time frame, which grew smaller with every production meeting. "We initially asked for eight weeks," said Criswell, "which is not a lot of time. That



The Criswell Productions crew (l to r, star kneeling) Robbie Lindores and Edwin Ru

got compressed to six but by the time we got our actors, we actually put together everything you're going to see on the screen in four weeks." The only way Criswell's team was able to accomplish its task on that schedule was for the entire crew to work nonstop around the clock for the entire period of pre-production. "In six weeks time nobody has had a day off at all," said Criswell. "It's been kind of impossible, but it's a good feeling that it's all come together like it has."

Criswell solved the time crunch by carefully budgeting his crew's time and effort. "We separated things into levels,"

Andreas Katsulas as G'Kar.





Rob Sherwood, Greg Aronowitz, Ron Mendell, Asao Gotto, Dave Snyder, Scott Sirag, with some of the more than 30 characters they designed and created in just four weeks.

explained Aronowitz. "Out of thirty creatures, five you can get as close to as you want, five are okay in the middle ground, and the rest stay in the background. When we put them in the shot we choreograph it so that as the camera layers back, they all look of equal quality."

Although *BABYLON 5* is being shot on 35mm, the nature of its video presentation also lessened the need for minute detail. "With film, you need to have much more definition," said Aronowitz. The overall shape of the aliens was considered more important than the details. "In most cases, we just went for the mass," accord-

ing to Aronowitz. That was not the case for a handful of major alien characters, including G'Kar, the Narn ambassador played by Andreas Katsulas, created with a high level of realistic prosthetic detail.

The time and energy saved by Criswell's group in putting less detail into some of the background characters, was used to make G'Kar's prosthetic design hyper-realistic. Watching the makeup being applied to Katsulas, when the job is done, one has to fight the urge to grab the actor by the chin and brow ridges to see if they are real.

Criswell credited the realism

Making up Katsulas, Rob Sherwood applying the design of the Narn ambassador.



of the makeup to carefully balancing elements of the sculptural design and paint job, paying careful attention to each. "You have the finest sculpture, but by the time it's painted, a lot can be lost," noted Criswell of his experience on other jobs. According to Criswell, common practice in effects makeup is to paint the prosthetic piece with the grain of the sculpture. "They try to pick up the highlights, keep the shadows with all the wrinkles and detail." But painting with the grain often fills in and obscures the desired detail. To heighten the detail on G'Kar, Aronowitz painted the makeup pieces against the grain of the sculpted features.

Having been given pretty much free rein to design the background aliens, many of Criswell's species seem to come from planets where the dominant intelligent life form evolved from a species other than monkeys. "Things are based on frogs and elephants," noted Criswell. Not to mention his gorilla bartender, a small homage to *PLANET OF THE APES*, the film Criswell cited as being most influential in his decision to pursue a career in effects makeup. Aronowitz cited *STAR WARS*.

Criswell is already making plans for more makeups in the event that *BABYLON 5* is picked up as a series. "It's going to get really wacky, very strange," said Criswell. "Had we had a little more time on this one, you would have seen a lot stranger things."

With more time to work on a series, Criswell plans to rethink many of the pilot's hastily-conceived designs. Criswell also plans to build multiple copies of some species which were represented in the pilot by just one makeup due to budget and time constraints.

Criswell wants to "move away from the humanoid main characters and do a couple of episodes focused around one of the alien races," realized with animatronic puppets. Criswell would like to see one of his puppets become one of the show's main characters.

"We're really hoping to be able to introduce some exotic alien species into the main cast," he said. "We're really



Black Eyes, a puppet by John Criswell seen working on a robotic device in the alien quadrant of the *Babylon 5*.

lucky to have the actors that we have in the makeups, but it would be great to have a main character that was not a person but more or less of a Yoda, but not even that humanoid."

Added Aronowitz, "We're trying to break away from the idea that you always have to have a man under a mask." According to Criswell, although initially a bit leery, Straczynski has begun to warm up to the concept of a mechanical lead. "We truly will take you to where no man has gone before," said Criswell. □

Mira Furlon being made-up by Ron Wild as the Minbari ambassador, DeLenn. Bottom: An early color test.



5 BABYLON 5

COSTUME DESIGN

Catherine Adair had just a scant five weeks to clothe an entire universe.

By David
Ian Salter

When their original choice for BABYLON 5 costume designer began turning out costumes that didn't mesh with creator Joe Straczynski's vision for the show, production designer John Iacovelli was forced to quickly find a new designer who was up to the task of not only outfitting an entire universe worth of human and alien cultures, but doing it all in the scant five weeks remaining before the first day of production. Iacovelli turned to Catherine Adair, who had already proven herself to be speedy on the short-lived series MANN & MACHINE.

"He asked me if I thought I could put it together in five weeks and I laughed," recalled Adair of her first phone conversation with Iacovelli. "I put MANN & MACHINE together in five days, so I said, 'Actually, five weeks is a luxury.'" It was only after her first meeting with the production team on the show that Adair first became aware that she might have bitten off more than she was prepared to chew. Adair hadn't realized that BABYLON 5 was set 200 years in the future.

Out of the five weeks of pre-production time allowed, Adair had to set aside so much time for research, primarily discussions with Straczynski to ensure that she had a thorough grasp of the future milieu in which she was working, as well as the actual construction of the many complicated costumes, that she was ultimately left with less time to design the costumes for BABYLON 5 than she had for the significantly less complex MANN & MACHINE.

"I had three days to do it," explained Adair. "I met them on a Thursday, took the script home and researched my brains out, then met with them again all day Monday. That left Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday to sketch it all, and from there we went into the actual manufactur-



Adair with Babylon 5's captain.

ing. Joe was wonderful in telling me what he didn't want. In fact, they all were. And they were all in agreement about it. They wanted something different, not pajamas, not Spandex."

Adair cited Ridley Scott's dark and visually complex BLADERUNNER and to a lesser extent, the similarly dark and claustrophobic OUTLAND as primary influences on the visual style of the show. She also included STAR WARS, THE

ROAD WARRIOR, BUCKAROO BANZAI and EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY as other personal influences on her work for BABYLON 5. "I also looked at a lot of historical costumes, and a lot of folk costumes, and a lot of fringe clothing," said Adair. "Not punk, but street clothing influences. Japan does some fascinating things where they mix stuff up.

"Joe [Straczynski] established for us that the space station is run by Earth Alliance officers," she said. "One of the first questions I had was, 'How strong is the military influence?' Even if it's not very strong, whether you're legitimate military in a national sense, or working for an outfit that is simply organized, there is usually a uniform."

Adair, aided by her assistant, Alan Trubman ("my left and right hand"), approached the daunting task of clothing an entire fictional universe by considering the clothing for each alien race separately. "I've tried to keep certain textures

Adair's costume design for G'Kar, the Narn ambassador, drawn up before Andreas Katsulas was cast in the role, which called for changes.



Michael O'Hare as Babylon 5 Commander Sinclair and Mira Furlon as DeLenn, the Minbar ambassador, designs by Adair, who costumed MANN & MACHINE.

[specific] to each world, and cross them over in some places where you get the feeling these two races had a history," said Adair. "That's something I'd like to refine if we got to series. The alien nations have as much right to a national identity as the humans do. I'd love there to be the same logic in all of them."

Adair noted that she will consider her job well done if no one in the audience takes special notice of her designs. "Especially with the principal characters," she said. "I want the audience to accept [the costumes], so we can get on with the story. The story that Joe [Straczynski] told me, the saga in his head, is extraordinary. It gets very tiring on the eyes [if the costumes are overdone]. It's one thing if you have fantastic makeup, like G'Kar—he can afford to carry something more intricate with it. If you dressed him down too much, it would get out of balance. But I wanted you to accept what the humans were wearing, and then move on from there, and get on with their lives and story.

"The whole piece needs to work as a unit," said Adair. "I want it to be believable. I want the audience to enjoy it. If people come away and say, 'The clothes look great,' I've screwed up." □



actually, which is interesting," said Iacovelli. "We're very influenced by *BLADE RUNNER* and *BRAZIL*, as I said, but we didn't want it to be as sinister. It's a more friendly kind of technofuture. The lights are motorized and change color with dichrolic filters. It's like a Sting concert with lights that move. We get a lot more bang for our buck. We have a computer operator who does it. I was initially nervous about it. They're used primarily in discos. We use all kinds of lights, chemo-flows and other flourescents. We have technology we didn't have a few years ago."

Reflecting the designer's ingenuity is the use of the traditional in very untraditional ways. In order to enhance the futuristic look of the station's main corridor is a track on which maintenance droids can often be seen running. In actuality, the track is a dolly normally used to move the camera, which leads to a painted backdrop. The use of a forced-perspective matte makes the corridor appear to stretch into the horizon.

The set of "The Gathering" has the lean feel of an independent film. Without union heirarchies, everyone on the production seems to play an essential part in the creative mix. Knowing that a series commitment hinges on an ability to deliver a final product on time and on budget challenges the crew to work faster and more efficiently on their less-than \$3 million budget. The figure is miniscule for a show of *BABYLON 5*'s complexity.

Creator Straczynski can often be found walking the sets, accessible to the cast and crew at all times, as is Academy Award-winning physical special effects coordinator John Stears, a veteran of *STAR WARS* and the James Bond films. Stears approached

“CGI allows us to do things on a scale previously unthinkable. Our star gate is about 7 miles long. A model would be too costly.”

— Creator Joe Straczynski —



The Customs Section control room, William E. McLachlan, the show's automated Veralights lighting operator, punching buttons on camera, in costume.

the producers about working on the project when he heard about it through the Hollywood grapevine. Stears is working for far less than his usual fee, and has been responsible for rigging a series of explosions aboard the station near the pilot's conclusion.

"We have a fair budget," said executive producer Doug Netter. "We have to really work hard to get everything we want at that budget and make a schedule that's difficult. The cost will be considerably less than that which has been announced by *STAR TREK*. I think we're going to make the show for considerably less than \$1 million an hour, but still with quality use of prosthetics, computer graphics and other developing techniques that get better and better and quicker and quicker and less expensive every day."

Despite the professed enthusiasm which has rallied the

troups to perform, *BABYLON 5* has encountered its fair share of obstacles on the road to completion, including early budget estimates on set construction that were stratospheric for a medium-budget show. "The set costs were enormous," said Netter. "We had to find a way to do it ourselves rather than subcontract it out, which is what we did. The price that we did the sets for Warners doesn't believe. We did it as an independent company, away from a studio, which helps. We also had serious doubts until we found people who believed in us like Dick Robertson at Warner Bros and Evan Thompson at Chris-Craft. They didn't feel the cost of the genre could be contained and when you're rejected initially you begin to believe it yourself. We soon learned the parameters it had to come in at and we closed in on the sites to make it at that price, and we've done that."

The most important element in allowing a show of *BABYLON 5*'s scale to be rendered on a television budget are the advances in computer graphics which have allowed the production to utilize the latest developments to composite their special effects entirely on computer. This allowed the producers the luxury of discarding the costly miniature and motion-control work which has burdened the budget of all genre efforts that have preceded it, including *V*. Straczynski noted, however, that the advantages of this technology are not entirely budgetary, but aesthetic as well.

"It does several things for us," said Straczynski. "We are allowed to do things on a scale previously unimaginable. The star gate's about 5-7 miles long. To create a model that big would be extremely expensive as would the *Babylon 5* station. It allows us to put things in real perspective and correct time ratios. It looks more real than a



Ambassador DeLenn

DeLenn is an enigmatic alien ambassador representing the Minbari Alliance, played by Yugoslavian actress Mira Furlon. DeLenn is a friend of *Babylon 5* Commander Sinclair, but seemingly abandons him in the pilot when he is accused of poisoning the Vorlon ambassador. The Minbari are a spiritual race who are disciples of a secret group of holy men called the "Grey Council." DeLenn is a male. Furlon's voice is lowered for the part in post-production.

"We had the problem of bringing up her shoulders and hiding her bosom and waist," said costume designer Catherine Adair. "And we didn't want her to roast to death or look like the Michelin Man."

Welcome to *Babylon 5*

CUSTOMS SECTOR

B-5 GENERAL DATA

B-5 OFFERS 3 BASIC GRAVITY LEVELS, (.5, 1, 2), & ENCOUNTER SUITS ENGINEERED TO YOUR SPECIFIC NEEDS, AS WELL AS PROSTHETICS & MOTIVE ASISTS FOR PROTOPLASMIC & NON-ANTHROPOID BEINGS

MONITORS AND CAUTIONS ARE GALACTIC STANDARD ICONOGRAPHIC WRITTEN INSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH CENTAURN, & INTERLAC

Pick Your Gravity

Graphic designer Ted Haigh's sign in Customs (above) alerts incoming passengers on *Babylon 5* that the station can accommodate the galaxy's diverse species with gravity and atmospheres to suit the requirements of their species. "Most of the hard science we thought about early on," said Haigh. "I read Larry Niven's *Ringworld*, which explains the idea."

Notes Commander Sinclair in the pilot, "Methane breathers, silicon life forms, insectoids—you name it—sooner or later everyone comes to *Babylon 5*."

5 BABYLON 5

THE VIDEO TOASTER

NewTek's video toy cum household appliance could revolutionize production.

By Les Paul Robley

In 1991 NewTek launched the world's first desktop television studio in the form of the stand-alone Video Toaster system, a consumer product that has crossed over into professional motion picture and television production, the cost-saver behind the stunning computer effects of BABYLON 5. The Toaster allows virtually anyone to produce broadcast-quality videos with the effects and graphics capabilities of a high-end network television station... all for the unheard of price of \$4,000.

An overriding theme in every production is to make things affordable. Science fiction priced itself out of the television market in the '70s and '80s with expensive, non-thought-provoking shows like BUCK ROGERS and BATTLESTAR GALACTICA. People insisted there was no room for science fiction on TV, yet STAR TREK's been

on since its cancellation, sometimes two or three times a day. With CG, producers can now afford to make effects shows at a price that won't break studios' budgets. Hopefully, BABYLON 5 will trigger the resurgence of a big boom in science fiction for television. And the Video Toaster may revolutionize the visual effects industry for TV.

"Our original plug-in card version of the Toaster (which sold for \$1,600) required that the user be familiar with computers," said NewTek vice-president Paul Montgomery. Over four years in development, the stand-alone version enabled consumers and small companies to buy a complete, bare-bones computer graphics system with five megabytes of memory and easy-to-use software for video switching, 150 digital video effects, 35 ns broadcast-quality character generation, chroma FX color processing, 3-D animation and paint programs with a 16.8 mil-



NewTek's Video Toaster 2.0, graphic imaging capabilities at consumer prices.

lion color palette.

The nice thing about a Toaster package for the entry-level user is that everything's included. One plugged it into a television and immediately saw an image. NewTek has its sights set squarely on the masses, the millions of camcorder owners. Insisted Montgomery, "Maybe the next Steven Spielberg will have been a Toaster owner."

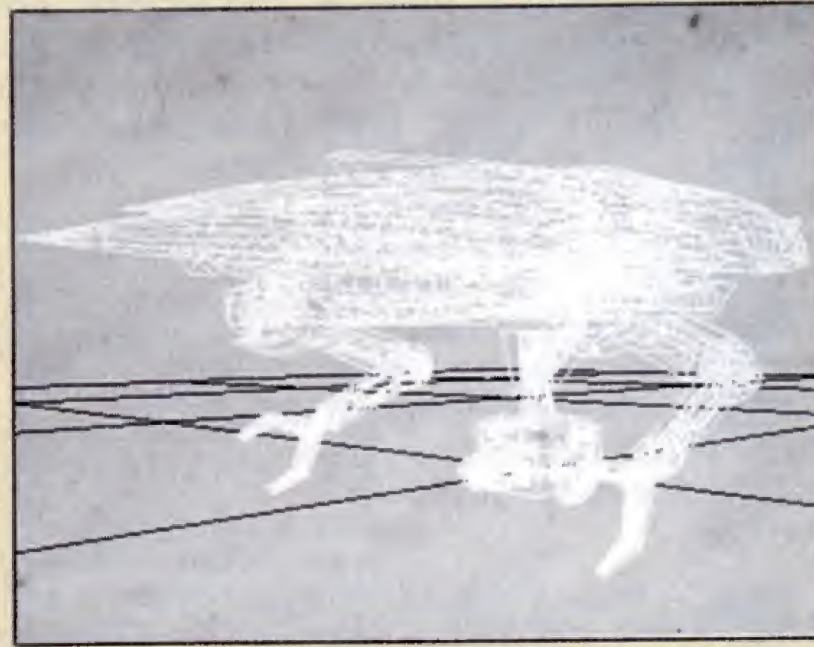
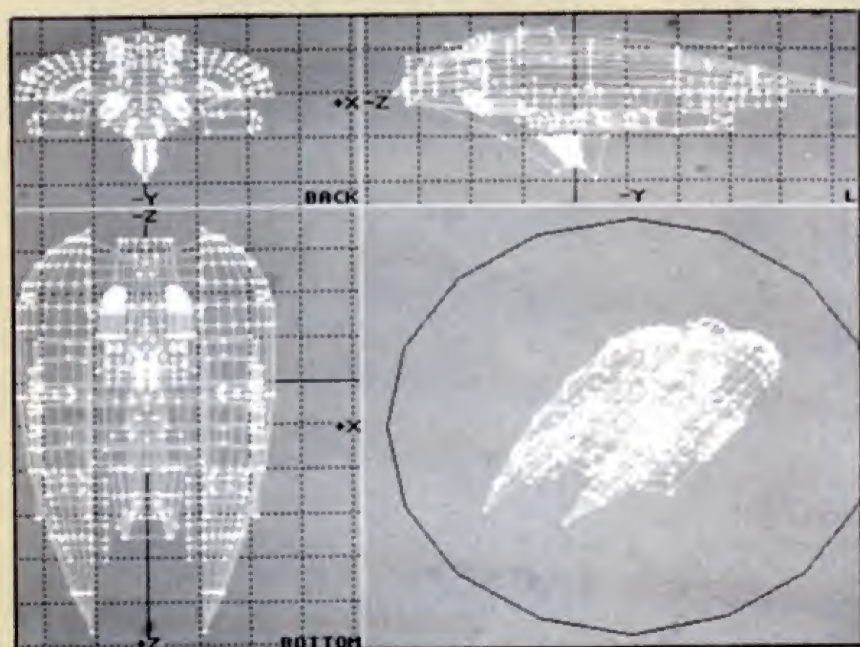
At the heart of the Video Toaster Workstation are seven custom chips and over 350,000 lines of assembly-language software. Everything from flying logos to scientific visualization, and the most sophisticated effects seen on broadcast television are now within reach of any videomaker. Every Toaster includes two high-speed, true-color frame buffers; broadcast-quality 24-bit 3-D rendering and animation software; an object modeler called LightWave 3-D whereby objects could be divided into as many as eight layers for easy editing of complex shapes

(these layers can be superimposed over each other, with any number of layers specified as active or inactive); and a YIQ encoder for crystal-clear output to any VCR or laser disk recorder. An optional D2 interface can be added for stunning direct digital composite output to high-end VTRs.

Foundation Imaging uses NewTek's Video Toaster 2.0 on BABYLON 5, the same model available to consumers. Home users can start off with a basic Toaster system, employing a fairly slow processor with five megabytes of memory, and begin doing some of the things Foundation Imaging is doing. As the drug takes hold, one can easily wreck his or her credit card, because the sky's the limit when considering the amount of peripherals that can be added. First-time camcorder users normally need to add two TBCs and an encoder or genlock so they can convert computer images onto videotape, and then wipe or dissolve the image with a digital effects switcher.

NewTek's Video Toaster 2.0 can be coupled to a Sony industrial Hi-8 9650 single-frame recording VCR and automatically send rendered 24-bit color images onto videotape one frame at a time. This is a much cheaper alternative than outputting directly to a digital film recorder. A top-of-the-line Toaster system with 32 megs of memory running at 28 megahertz with 200 megabyte hard drive will cost in the neighborhood of \$10,000. □

Foundation Imaging's design for a BABYLON 5 maintenance droid on the Toaster's Lightwave 3-D modeling program.



model going by in front of a picture where the perspective isn't quite there."

BABYLON 5 isn't the first time a revolution in computer graphics has been heralded. As early as 1981, Disney promised that TRON would redefine the way in which special effects were done. It didn't. In the mid-'80s, the producers of THE LAST STARFIGHTER once again boasted that their revolutionary process would change visual effects forever. The film was a flop. But with BABYLON 5 it appears that the age of computer-animated special effects may truly have arrived. "The problem with TRON and THE LAST STARFIGHTER is that it looked like a computer did it," said Straczynski. "I've shown our special effects to computer guys who didn't know. We now have the technology to do things a little more textured."

Visual effects supervisor Ron Thornton estimated that the special effects budget alone for BABYLON 5, utilizing traditional effects techniques, would easily cost over \$2 million. But few things on this show are traditional. Costume designer Catherine Adair explained how she stayed clear of the science fiction racks at the Los Angeles costume houses.

"When you go in and say you're doing BABYLON 5 and it's science fiction, the first thing anyone says is, 'Let us show you our science fiction line,'" said Adair. "From the little bit I know about the genre, the readers and the followers know their stuff. Their attention to detail is fabulous. I'd go through stuff and I'd say, 'What was it used in; what is it from?' I didn't want to use anything that was used before."

In addition to state-of-the-art special effects, BABYLON 5 also features the latest in prosthetic creations by John Criswell (DINOSAURS) and his creature shop companions.

"We tried to be relentlessly logical about this. To have a station for humans and aliens, what type would you need to have?"

- Creator Joe Straczynski -



Foundation Imaging's visual effects supervisor Ron Thornton (seated, right) in his BABYLON 5 cameo as the 23rd century's equivalent of the homeless.

"There are no funny forehead guys," said Straczynski of Criswell's creatures. "Criswell and his bunch of elves promised us 20 different species and when we were done we had over 50. They've just gone nuts. They've gone to town. They're excited about the show. They're working seven days a week, 20 hours a day, in shifts, and not being paid for some of this stuff. The good thing about having the amazing Criswell working with us is that we have humanoid aliens, small ones, big ones, multi-legged and fully animatronic. He has some new techniques he's anxious to use on the series where you can pre-record the voice track and the mouth movements. We can do very non-human aliens. We can imply others."

Among the denizens of the station, including the alien ambassadors, are those inhabiting the ship's other sections which feature alternate atmos-

pheres and gravities. "In the alien section Criswell wants to do some really weird shit," said Straczynski. "We tried to be relentlessly logical about this. To have a station for humans and aliens, what would you have to have? You get the alternate environments, oxygen for humanoids and alternate atmospheres. If you want to walk among aliens, you wear an encounter suit. Instead of limiting you, it gives you even more possibilities."



One of the actors under alien prosthetics, NEXT GENERATION veteran Andreas Katsulas, is excited about the versatility of the makeup which takes under two hours to apply as opposed to the three hours he spent in the chair to be transformed into a Romulan Centurion for STAR TREK. "All of this is covering a lot of my bad acting," joked Katsulas, who plays G'kar, the Narn ambassador. "This character has such nobility. As weird as that might sound, he has dignity

and an animalistic quality which I love. There's something very mysterious and ancient about masks, the idea of transformation. I'm enjoying that aspect of it. It's not just silliness to me. It's something that's in the human species. I don't know what it is we see in masks. Children get off on it; adults do. It's cross-cultural; it's cross-generational."

Tamilyn Tomita, who plays Laurel Takishima, BABYLON 5's second-in-command, has found working with the various alien species easy thanks to their realism. "For the actors who are playing the aliens, there are no barriers holding them back," said Tomita. "If it's over the top, it could be perceived as comical. But it's not just people walking around in masks with serious body language and eye contact. They think differently, they act differently and they react differently."



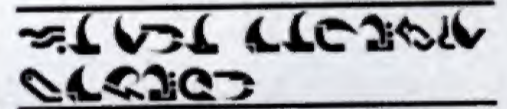
Lyta Alexander

Patricia Talman plays the station's resident telepath, Lyta Alexander. A convenient aid to businessmen making deals, Lyta is a member of the psi corps, always gloved to prevent inadvertent thought reading.

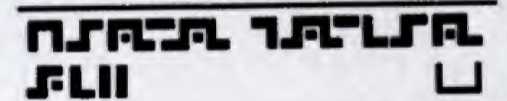
Series creator J. Michael Straczynski has been tight-lipped in divulging too much about the character, leading the actress to ponder Lyta's backstory on her own. "I see it like *Ender's Game*, a novel by Orson Scott Card, which deals with how they train them," said Talman. "I can be an unimpeachable witness in court. There are psi cops that go after rogue psi people."

**ALTERNATE ATMOSPHERE
CAUTION: METHANE**

English



Interlac



Centauri

Alien Languages

Graphic artist Ted Haigh devised two alien languages to be used, along with English, on *Babylon 5*. "Interlac is a sort of futuristic galactic Esperanto," said Haigh. "The second is Centauri, the British Empire of BABYLON 5, colonizers on their way down. It's very primary, much the way we use English today."

There are myriad other alien tongues beside the primary languages. "Every solar system has planets," said Haigh, who also represents other Earth tongues on the ship, including Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Spanish. "I wanted us to use ideograms," said Haigh. "And the latter is easy to get translated around here."



Ambassador Londo

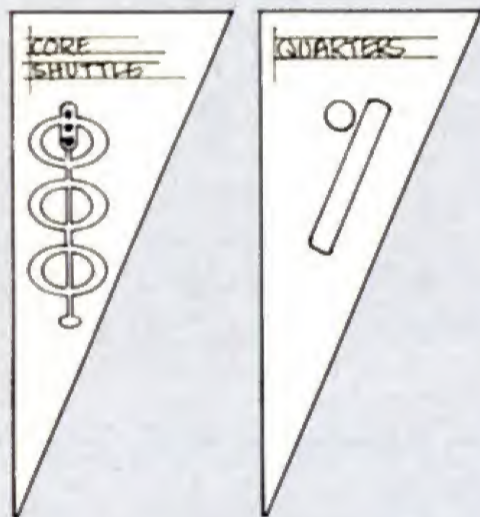
Londo, played by veteran character actor Peter Jurassic, represents the Centauri, a once great Galactic Empire in decline. Londo is fond of drinking and carousing and can often be found in the station's casino or bar.

GARIBALDI

I suppose you heard what happened?

LONDO

About the ambassador. Yes... pity. I suppose there'll be a war now. All that running around and shooting at each other... You'd think sooner or later it would go out of fashion.



Signs of the Times

Graphic designer Ted Haigh came up with a symbolic language for the signs of *Babylon 5* befitting the ship's diverse alien population. "The locator graphics are called pizza pies," said Haigh. "We wanted to do an iconographic symbol set without being anthropomorphic. Balls represent beings, or in the case of the shuttle bay, a docking ship. Six balls, three on each side of a rectangle, represents the conference room."

"In *BABYLON 5*, as with *2001* there is intended to be a logic behind the visuals. In terms of the magic of making it seem like a real and palpable universe it was *BLADE RUNNER* that set the tone. You don't have that in *STAR TREK*. The early series had painted cardboard for monitors."

The enthusiasm for the project shared by the entire crew includes its helmer Richard Compton. "He passed up two other jobs to come here, and without pay, started early on this thing and worked with the cameraman, and the production guys to get the look," said Straczynski. "I've never seen that. He directed a whole bunch of *EQUALIZER*, *HILL STREET BLUES* and one *STAR TREK*, and vowed never to return. He was in an original *STAR TREK* as an actor and he's amazing. He agrees with me about the look of the show, which is that we want it to have—a darker look. He wants to shoot it as you would a mainstream drama with all the shadows and textures. If you liked the look of *THE EQUALIZER*, that's what we're going to do on this."

"I love him," said actress Patricia Talman, who portrays Lyta, a telepathic member of the Psi corps. Talman starred in Tom Savini's remake of *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* and George Romero's *KNIGHT-RIDERS*. "If you're doing what he wants you to do, Compton leaves you alone. He doesn't bother you. If he has a suggestion, you know he's right on. I got a sense of that as soon as I read for him. I really enjoy him. I compare him to George [Romero]."

Like much else on the show, executive producer Doug Netter proposed an unorthodox directing roster when the pilot goes to series. "I would like very much to have Richard join us on the series and, if possible, have him direct every other episode," said Netter of alternating directors bi-weekly. "If I could find two directors that are compatible, that's the best of all worlds. One prepares, one directs. We did it when I produced *5 MILE CREEK* in Australia and we changed the first assistant director too. He stays with the director, because he can do budgets and overall

“We’ve decided we want to make a computer-generated character that would probably be recurring. It’s never been done.”

— *Fx chief Ron Thornton* —



Director Richard Compton (center) sets up a camera angle, filming the *Babylon 5* jury about to investigate Sinclair's blame in the death of ambassador Kosh.

production. It's prepare, shoot, prepare, shoot. It's wonderful continuity but you must have the two directors who are just right."

With the two-hour pilot now a reality, series creator Straczynski is champing at the bit to unleash a barrage of images for the series never before seen on the small screen. "It's all in my head," said Straczynski. "There are 200 pages of notes which are all coded in case it falls in the wrong hands. I want to do this show. I want to tell this story. I want to break some new ground, not fertilize it. There's stuff we have planned that's so fucking neat!"

Among the technological breakthroughs promised by Straczynski for the show is the prospect of completely computer-generated characters to enhance the extraterrestrial

look of certain alien races which can't be achieved through prosthetics alone. "Ron [Thornton] says he can do it," said Straczynski. "I want him to prove it to me. Having some background with computer-generated characters, I've never seen one look convincing yet. I know it can be done. He says he's come up with something where he can do it. He wants to put one small alien character in the pilot, in the back of a scene that can be done like this. I don't think it's possible, but I'm looking forward to being proven wrong."

When the pilot is broadcast in February, Warner Bros will make its final determination based on budget and ratings criteria as to whether they will green-light *BABYLON 5* for a full-season commitment. "We just really want to do the series," said Netter. "*BABYLON 5* has been so important to Joe. We shook hands about four or five years ago when he first completed it and never had a piece of paper between us. And

Joe has the imagination for the next year, the following year, and the year after that. We're not in business to just make the pilot, but to prove we can make the series. That's the only real money you can make in television. But there's a little bit more than just the money for Joe and me. It's to prove to Warners and everyone else that we can be as good or better than *STAR TREK*."

For Straczynski, the production of *BABYLON 5* at Warner Bros is the culmination of a long-held dream. And with the impending airing of the pilot this February, he's about to share his vision with the rest of America. "I've lived with this for four years in which time I could have sold a lot of other stuff," said Straczynski. "But I wanted to do a science fiction saga for television and the reality that this has finally come through is just a kick." □

5 BABYLON 5

THE FUTURE OF CGI

Innovations on the horizon include computer-generated actors to bolster the cast.

By David Ian Salter

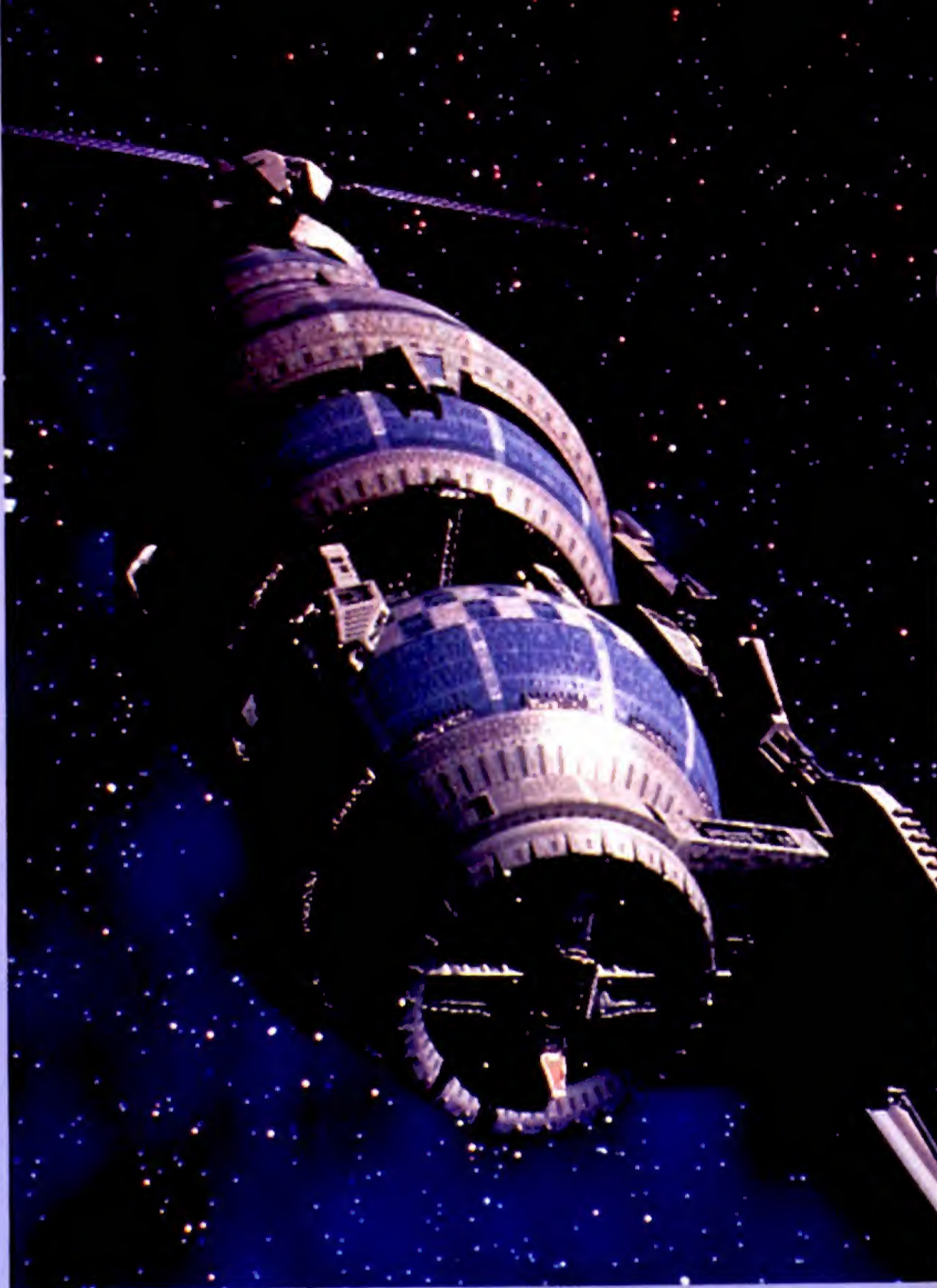
When viewers tune in to the *BABYLON 5* pilot this February, the first image that will appear on millions of television screens across the country will be a starship approaching the six-mile long *BABYLON 5* space station through the vacuum of space. The image will be one of stunning detail, clarity and beauty. Whatever impact the new show has on the viewing public, there can be no question that the work of Foundation Imaging will permanently raise the standards by which television visual effects are judged.

Foundation Imaging is working so close to the cutting edge of computer graphics imaging technology that there have been major breakthroughs and advances in software since effects production began on the show in March. Most exciting is a new capacity to create

computer-generated alien creatures that move in a realistic, organic manner thanks to new software that creates movement with calculations based on an inner skeletal structure. The result is creature or character movement that seems more natural and less mechanical.

Foundation Imaging supervisor Ron Thornton said he planned to use the new capabilities for computer-generated creatures only sparingly in the pilot. But if all goes well, Thornton has big plans for future episodes, should the series get picked up. "In the pilot we're just going to do a couple of experiments," said Thornton. "They'll be pretty much throwaways, but it's something that [series creator] Joe [Straczynski] and I have discussed. We've decided that we want to make a computer-generated character that would probably repeat. It's never been done before, and we think

Foundation's CGI "vortex generator," a massive seven-mile-long star gate.



The *Babylon 5* station, computer-generated effects by Foundation Imaging.

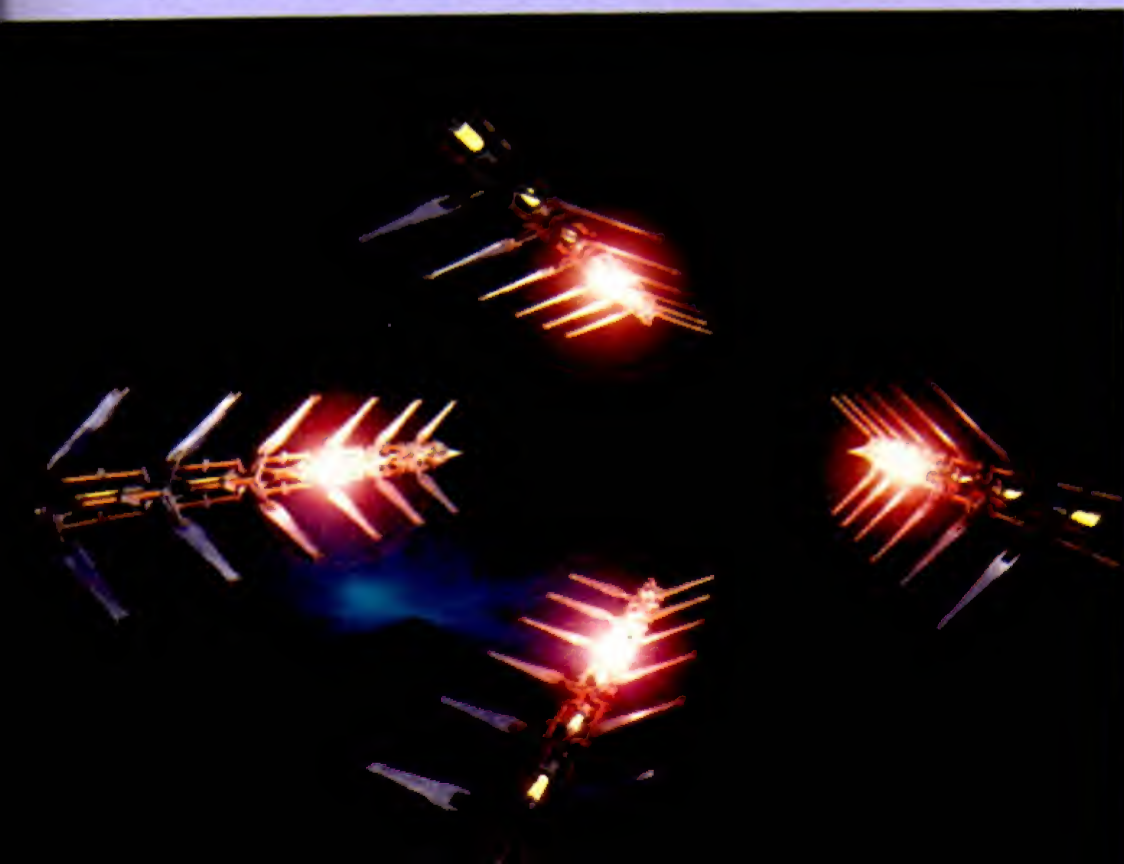
that we can get a range out of it that would be very different. If we can fill in a gap that makeup effects can't and mechanical effects can't, then we should do it, because it will interest people."

Foundation Imaging benefits from personalized software support from NewTek, creators of the Video Toaster technology that makes the show possible. NewTek has custom-designed system software to fit the needs of *BABYLON 5*. In return, NewTek is given an in-depth, real-world test of their hardware and software. NewTek plans to release all of the new software breakthroughs that have been developed for Foundation Imaging to the consumer market once the bugs have been worked out.

Despite the strides being made, Thornton predicted that traditional low-tech visual effects specialists don't have to worry about losing their jobs to computer programmers. "A

computer person can't do this," said Thornton. "That's one of the reasons I'm here, because of my film background. Computer people don't understand how film works. They'll fly in and zoom around something and fly in and out of its ear. That kind of razzle dazzle blows the pacing of a show."

Foundation network specialist Paul Biegle-Bryant described one potential character under consideration: "A real three-dimensional shape changer," said Bryant, "not a morph, but something that will actually interact with the environment." According to Bryant, "Whatever [Straczynski] wants to dream up, we'll do. I'm looking forward to finding the boundary." Thornton shares Bryant's enthusiasm for testing the limits of the system. "We want to be able to say to [Straczynski], 'Let it go, come up with the wackiest stuff you want. Let's push the envelope.'" □



DOPPELGANGER

ET's pal has grown up to play with a different kind of animatronic wonder.

By Sheldon Teitelbaum

DOPPELGANGER is the second U.S. feature for Israeli director Avi Neshet (TIME BOMB), starring Drew Barrymore as a writer with a dangerous and unusual case of multiple personality disorder (MPD). Produced by ITC (the STEPFATHER series), the film was shot last March and April in a north San Fernando Valley warehouse and on Los Angeles locations but is not set to open theatrically through ITC until sometime next year.

Special effects are provided by the KNB Efx Group, the Chatsworth, California company responsible for the rotting corpses in Sam Raimi's EVIL DEAD III. The film showcases a hideous creature created by KNB, based upon designs by Raluca, a Romanian artist, and Iris Harel, a young, Hollywood-based sculptress and photographer. Harel is known for designing "psychosexual furniture"—some of it incorporating motifs not

Barrymore's screen debut at age 7 in Steven Spielberg's 1982 hit, ET.



Howard Berger of the KNB Efx Group touches up Barrymore's Doppelganger.

guaranteed to easily net her NEA funding these days—the kind that would have been perfectly at home in Stanley Kubrick's A CLOCKWORK ORANGE. Neither had previous experience in film.

"I have this traditional fear of movie people, including myself," said Neshet. "We have all seen too many movies and our imaginations are geared to what we have seen. I find it useful to bring in people from other mediums who couldn't care less about cinematic tradition, and who can bring in a whole new outlook."

Despite the horror props, however, DOPPELGANGER is actually a pared-down, psychologically intense horror-thriller with genuine Hitchcockian overtones. Neshet wrote it as an antidote to the

taxing, universe-building effort that went into planning HAMMERHEADS, his yet-to-be-filmed, far-future science fiction epic. "It was an attempt to make a genuinely terrifying film by narrowing the focus," said Neshet, a former Israeli commando and first lieutenant whose fellow platoon member, Uzi Gal, trained Linda Hamilton for TERMINATOR 2.

"On HAMMERHEADS, we were doing nothing but straight design work for eight months, conceptualizing New York City at the end of the next century," said Neshet. "We worked with architects, mathematicians, painters and sculptors, none of whom had ever worked on a film before. It was a great exercise in design, but it got a little tiring. Suddenly you understood what Kubrick went

through when he was doing 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY. You understand why it took five years to make."

Neshet wrote DOPPELGANGER during feverish evenings within a four-week period while HAMMERHEADS was being readied for production. It's the story of a beautiful and intensely sexual but emotionally troubled young woman (Barrymore), who moves in as a boarder with a struggling, vulnerable young screenwriter. They become intimate, and, as a result, the young man discovers that she suffers from a multiple personality disorder beyond the annals of abnormal psychology or even horror movies.

One of the notions contained in the movie, said Neshet, is that although the protagonist does indeed suffer a disorder related to the multiple personalities within her, all people suffer from varying degrees of this disorder, and all people contain multiple personalities, doppelgangers, or "others," within them. "Psychiatry is a tricky business," said Neshet. "Oddity is something we are supposed to cure. Why? Is a sexual disorder like wanting too much sex a bad thing? We vent our emotions, so we are psychos—is that a bad thing? We repress our emotions—is that good? You have so much terminology for just basic human phenomena that is deemed bad and curable. And you ask, should it be cured—should we fuck around



Barrymore, now 17, poses with her new animatronic co-star, her literal split personality in *DOPPELGANGER*, directed by Avi Neshet for release by ITC.

with what it means to be a human being?

"I always seem to return to the notion of human identity, or human potential, of the human beast. Some of that is reflected in *TIME BOMB*, which specifically looks at what we are capable of and what we would like to forget we are capable of. I suppose it comes from my years in the Israeli army. In my unit, they took a bunch of well-brought-up, well-educated and idealistic youngsters and, with the help of an army psychologist, transformed them into a band of highly motivated, superbly trained and ready-to-obey killers.

"The term 'monstrous' is actually a misnomer. On the contrary, I find human beings and the sometimes horrendous things they do to be very human. And the sooner we come to terms with that essential humanity, the less sur-

prised we'll be when wars and murders and other tragedies break out.

"*DOPPELGANGER* does not try to put forth any sort of theory other than the sooner we get used to all the human options, the more we can deal with them. It is basically a film about people who find out they are not exactly what they seem to be."

Neshet noted that casting Barrymore, whose star has been rising quickly during the past year—particularly after the release of the film *POISON IVY*—was key to the movie's success. "Drew Barrymore is a genuine doppelganger," said Neshet. "She is the sweetest, nicest 17-year-old girl you'd ever meet. But there's a whole other personality to her—very sexual, almost violent, extremely talented, raw and powerful.

"She's different people at different times. I've spent time with her where she reminds me

TWO FACES OF DREW

"Barrymore is a genuine Doppelganger," said director Avi Neshet. "She is the sweetest, nicest 17 year-old, but with a whole other personality: sexual, raw, almost violent."

of my own high school days and the kids I knew, and other times when she gave me real estate advice. I've seen her go from being happy to sad in seconds. She's mercurial. She is totally the character, and the kinds of things she can do I could never possibly write. She knows more about the character than I do—she harbors all those people in her.

"Drew is a force of nature," continued Neshet, "someone whose doppelganger is more pronounced. I noticed this within the first ten minutes of meeting her. Most of us are not really in touch with our doppelgangers. Most would like to pretend we are integrated, and are really surprised when the other person kicks in. That's why we drink and take drugs—so we can feel more relaxed being the other person. Drew feels totally relaxed as both people without any artificial support, and doesn't need to apologize for acting lewdly or violently or sweetly.

"She isn't self-conscious. In fact, Drew is more under control than most of us because her doppelganger doesn't surprise her. She gets more angry and more loving quicker than most people I know. Yet, she's a popular girl and a truthful person. I like her and most people I know like her."

Barrymore's co-star in the film is Leslie Hope (*TALK RADIO*), who plays a writer in love with the guy Barrymore moves in with. "She's a wonderful actress," said Neshet of Hope, "but she is not at ease with her doppelganger. It was interesting to see how playing this character affected her perception of herself. She realizes she is too smart for her own good, the way Elizabeth [Barrymore's character] does in the movie. She'd watch Drew and say, 'Gee, it's great to be like that, how can you be that way?' She's more studied and intel-

lectual, which is, of course, why I cast her.

"It's interesting to see what meeting someone like Drew does to you. You ask, 'Am I genuine? Am I real? Am I living out my life or just faking it?'"

"I have several doppelgangers," Neshet said of himself, "a violent one, a sexual one—it comes out. If I were flashing my monsters around on an everyday basis, people would take exception. I'm lucky to be in a profession where I can put monsters on screen and deal with them directly." □

Barrymore in *DOPPELGANGER*, a part that runs the gamut from sweet, to sexy, to knife-wielding psychopath.



LEPRE

Warwick Davis goes from cuddly STAR

By Alan Jones

Trimark Pictures expects a huge pot of gold from **LEPRECHAUN**, based on early test previews which gave the Mark Jones-directed chiller the highest exit poll rating ever in the company's history. Few movies have focused on the legend of the leprechaun. Jones sought to redress the balance five years ago when he first had the idea to expand the Irish myth beyond the cliché of the jigging, merry prankster concept into the realm of macabre, malevolent horror. Trimark Pictures opens the film nationwide in January.

"We were coming out of the HALLOWEEN, FRIDAY THE 13TH calendar date horror cycle," said Jones, "and I wondered why St. Patrick's Day hadn't been tackled. We'd

The Leprechaun with his treasure. Lucky Charms breakfast cereal was director Mark Jones' inspiration.



Davis, who starred in George Lucas' RETURN OF THE JEDI, as the Leprechaun who terrorizes a North Dakota farm community to get back the pot of gold he gave an American.

also had elves, gnomes, gremlins and trolls. It was the Lucky Charms breakfast cereal, with its trademark leprechaun logo, that gave me the idea to combine the two."

A former writer/producer of the cartoon shows RUBIK THE AMAZING CUBE, SCOOBY DOO and SUPERFRIENDS, Jones also scripted episodes of THE A-TEAM, KNIGHTRIDER and SUPERBOY TV series. His work on the latter so impressed producer Ilya Salkind, Jones was asked to co-write the screenplay for SUPERMAN V which goes into production early this year.

"I wrote the script with SUPERBOY story editor Terry Bates," said Jones. "It will probably be retitled SUPERMAN: THE NEW MOVIE. We totally ignore the three sequels. It features the biggest—and best—villain the superhero has ever fought, with a huge surprise at the end concerning Lois Lane. Superman is older in our concept, meaning Christopher Reeve could easily play him again, and it's not set in outer space."

Jones wrote **LEPRECHAUN** for himself to direct and refused all offers to sell the screenplay outright unless he was attached to the project in that capacity. Said Jones, "I pitched **LEPRECHAUN** as a kid's horror movie and everyone was very enthusiastic about its potential, but I couldn't get anyone interested in taking a chance on me." Until producer Mark Amin at Trimark figured the opportunity was too good to miss. "They hate first-time directors too, but included me

reluctantly in the package after I argued long and hard that it was my vision and my concept and I was the only one who could pull off the horror cartoon approach I envisaged. Our relationship has been a love/hate one ever since."

LEPRECHAUN mixes malicious humor, whimsical horror and wacky retribution as it tells the tale of one of the mythic wee people leaving Ireland for North Dakota to get back the pot of gold he grudgingly gave an American tourist in return for setting him free when accidentally captured. Trapped again in a crate by a four-leaf clover—the one object that holds power over leprechauns—he escapes ten years later full of pent-up anger and lust for his stolen gold to terrorize a farm community. As Jones slyly remarked, "**FINIAN'S RAINBOW** this isn't!"

Starring Jennifer Aniston, Ken (APRIL FOOL'S DAY) Olandt and Mark (PEE-WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE) Holton, the one pre-production headache Jones had was casting the manacing title character. "I wasn't impressed by any of the little American actors we saw,"

Jones (l) directs little person Warwick Davis in the role, makeup by Gabe Bartalos.



CHAUN

WARS Ewok to slashing horror gnome.

he said. "None of them had the necessary charisma to carry the role. Then Warwick Davis' agent called to say he'd read the script and was very interested. I was amazed the star of WILLOW would even consider such a low-budget enterprise. But when he read for the part, he was perfect. The search was over as far as I was concerned and I insisted Trimark hire him."

Noted Englishman Davis, who also appeared in RETURN OF THE JEDI and EWOKS: THE BATTLE FOR ENDOR, "The fun side of LEPRECHAUN appealed to me. It did cross my mind that a horror picture, as soft as it is, might not be a good business move, the reason I refused to speak swear words. But as I don't want to be forever typecast in children's movies, I saw it as a career progression." More recently, Davis has been seen in the BBC TV series THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA and THE SILVER CHAIR and on American TV in ZORRO. And, yes, he keeps hearing the rumors about a new STAR WARS adventure, too, and still hopes George Lucas will keep his promise and cast him somewhere. Said Davis, "I think George does really want to continue the series but is scared it won't be as successful at the boxoffice because times have changed."

Davis noted that the original LEPRECHAUN script didn't feature much in the way of horror. "You never saw him do anything," he said. "But the stuff Trimark added wasn't graphic or gory anyway. There's a death by pogo stick that was fun because it was clamped onto the camera so they could get close-ups of me bouncing towards my victim. Hands are cut off and I melt down at the end, but there's nothing in it I

"I think George Lucas really wants to continue the STAR WARS series," said Ewok-turned-horror star Warwick Davis, "but he's scared it won't be as successful."



Bartalos dirties up the teeth, as Davis undergoes the makeup process. Trimark Pictures opens the \$1 million low-budget production nationwide in early January.

wouldn't let my children see."

Davis was fitted out in a top hat, buckled shoes, and leprechaun prosthetics designed by Gabe Bartalos. Davis said he didn't bother researching Irish folklore or try to attempt a lilting accent. Laughed Davis, "I did watch DARBY O'GILL AND THE LITTLE PEOPLE on video, but that was all!" Added Jones, "The accent was a point of discussion early on. I figured Warwick's English accent would be foreign enough to get by. I didn't want him sidetracked. I thought it would be easier to let Warwick be himself."

Shot for \$1 million over 28 days last February in Los Angeles and at the Big Sky Ranch in Simi Valley, California, Jones said the only difficulties he had directing LEPRE-

CHAUN came from Trimark's interference. "There were five producers on this show who each seemed to want a different movie and tone," said Jones. "It was hard work and bad enough having to film six pages of script a day without being tapped on the shoulder by people insisting I shoot the same scene a different way. They were lucky I could just manage to do it once! When I did give in, another would say, 'Why did you shoot that differently?' It was a no-win situation. Maybe I'm too nice a guy to bother arguing. There are people on the LEPRECHAUN credits I've never even met!"

Jones said he did argue with Trimark over their decision to cut the picture for a PG-13 rating. "The movie isn't as good now," he moaned. "No one

could be seen dying in the MPAA butcher job that reduced it to a PG-13."

One of the producers brought in to oversee the production was David F. Price, the director of CHILDREN OF THE CORN II: THE FINAL SACRIFICE. "David came on board two weeks before we started shooting because Trimark was still nervous about my first-time status," said Jones. "They thought I might need a director to advise me in case I got into any trouble. But he had no creative input at all because there wasn't any time for me to ask him anything even if I'd wanted to. If everyone had left me alone, LEPRECHAUN would have been a far more focused picture."

Noted Warwick Davis, "Price directed a few reshoots. Scenes were added to the cop's death. After I've pulled his eye out with my fingernails, he runs into the woods, I follow him and finally break his neck. Mark knew what he was doing and couldn't have been more helpful. It was a fun movie to work on. On big-budget movies people's hearts aren't always in the right place. LEPRECHAUN had no money behind it and we'd often work long hours into the night. Yet the committed team effort by the cast and crew was incredible." □

Davis as the titular hero of George Lucas' WILLOW (1988), still hoping to make another STAR WARS feature.



TIME TRAX

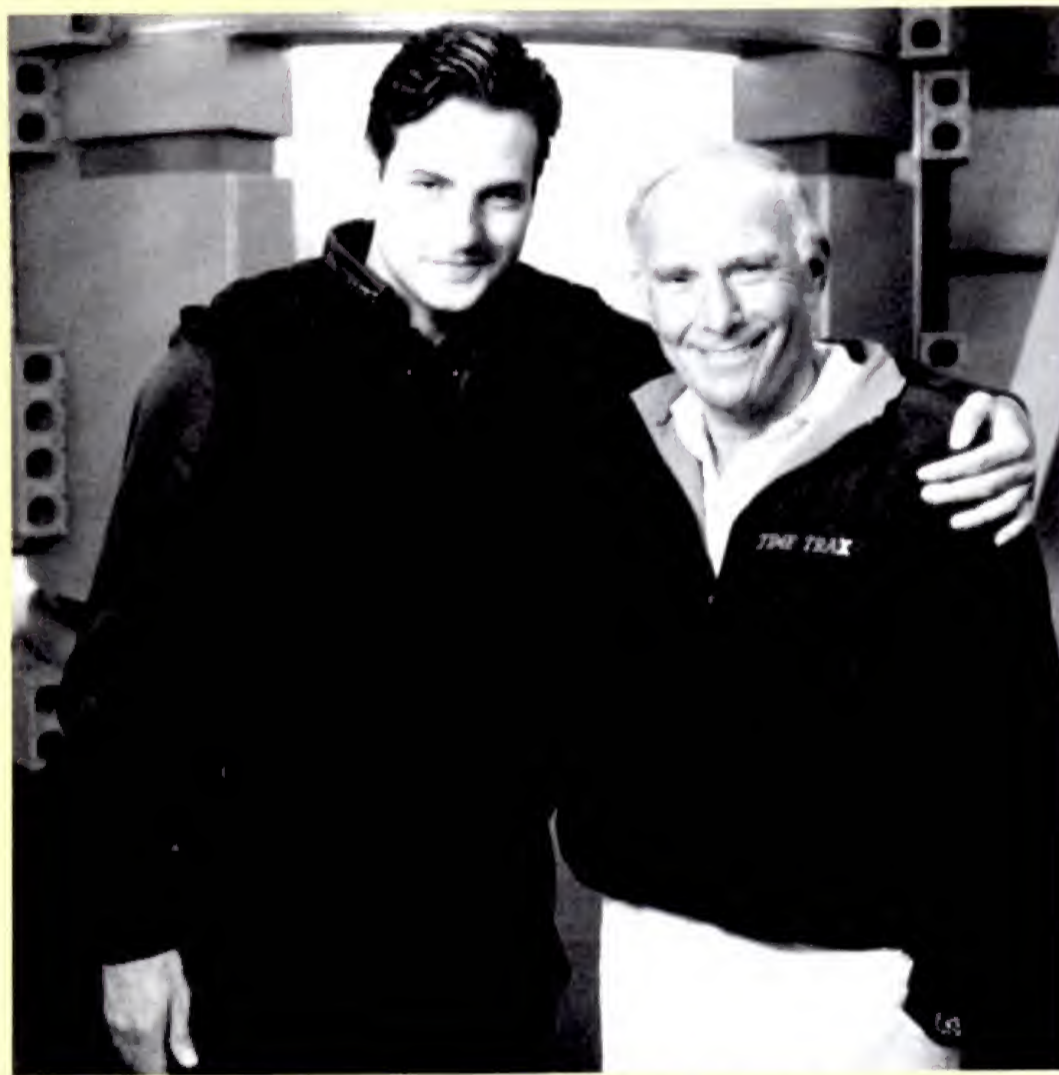
By Mark A. Altman

Harve Bennett, who spent nearly ten years in space as the great bird of the STAR TREK feature film series, producing and co-writing THE WRATH OF KHAN through THE FINAL FRONTIER, has come back down to earth as co-creator and executive producer of Lorimar's new science fiction series TIME TRAX. "I came back from space after 10 years," said Bennett, reflecting on his tenure as the man who ran the STAR TREK movie franchise for Paramount until he turned down an offer to produce STAR TREK VI when the studio refused to greenlight his proposed prequel, STARFLEET ACADEMY. Warner Bros premieres Bennett's new syndicated show in January on their Prime Time Network consortium of independent TV stations.

TIME TRAX stars Dale Midkiff (PET SEMATARY) as Darien Lambert, a police officer of the future, who discovers that a brilliant physicist of his time, Mordicai Sahmbi (Peter Donat), is sending criminals back in time to the 20th century to elude capture. Lambert tracks Sahmbi down in modern-day Washington D.C. in the series two-hour pilot, setting up a present-day backdrop for other episodic adventures featuring the future cop.

"Our show is a little bit different than a normal science fiction show," said co-creator and executive producer Grant Rosenberg, who came up with the idea for the series. "While it has a science fiction base, the actual weekly episodes are not really science fiction-oriented. Once you buy that this guy and the guy he's chasing are people from 200 years into the future,

STAR TREK producer Harve Bennett on a new science fiction trek.



Bennett (r) with series star Dale Midkiff as a detective from the future, during production in Australia. The syndicated series is set to premiere in January.

it becomes more of an action-oriented FUGITIVE than science fiction. He's got a couple of gadgets and cool things that will attract viewers. There will be some visual tricks in every episode, but we don't consider it heavily science fiction-oriented."

Rosenberg downplayed seeming similarities in the series' concept to the TERMINATOR films of James Camer-

on. "Our show is about as un-TERMINATOR as it can be," said Rosenberg. "It's not Schwarzenegger; it's not a hardware show. They say there are only seven ideas. You're going to be compared to something, so we might as well be compared to something that was a \$100 million hit."

Rosenberg is partnered on the show with Gary Nardino

whose production company sold the series to Warners and produces the episodes in Australia. Nardino, the former chief of TV production at Paramount, was the executive producer of STAR TREK features II and III, and brought in Bennett to flesh out Rosenberg's concept and write the series opener. Nardino hired Jeff Hayes as producer for his experience filming ABC's MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE and CBS's EARTH FORCE in Australia.

Lured back into the weekly television grind, Bennett, who had produced such shows as THE MODSQUAD and SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN, said he was attracted by the creative freedom offered by first-run syndication. Putting a little of himself in the material turned out to be a tremendous joy. "It turned out to be a labor of love," said Bennett. "It's very personal. You write best what you know best. Everything, from the doctor who delivered me, is immortalized, but nobody knows that but me and my kids. All the detail in the script about growing up in Chicago, which is called Enclave 6, 200 years from now, including all the interests of the hero, is a personal reflection of who I am now and what I loved growing up, including the Chicago Cubs."

One of Bennett's first assignments after leaving Paramount and STAR TREK behind, was writing CRASHLANDING: THE STORY OF FLIGHT 232, starring James Coburn, Richard Thomas and Charlton Heston, the highest rated TV movie on ABC in the last three years. "I began to realize after writing it that I like to write," said Bennett. "This is

what I want to do now. I don't have to worry about actor's egos and craziness and schedules."

Not surprisingly, one of the aspects of TIME TRAX which held great "fascination" for Bennett was the fish out of water aspect in which a man from the future finds himself trying to cope in contemporary society. It was a similar premise that resulted in Bennett's most critically acclaimed and financially successful STAR TREK feature, THE VOYAGE HOME.

Bennett promised that TIME TRAX wouldn't skimp on its science fiction content in equipping Midkiff as a futuristic detective. "This is not a superhero show," said Bennett. "But he has a 200 I.Q., a Mensa person by our standards. He has martial arts skills of the future, called Marsh-tee, which we made up. Midkiff is also equipped with a credit card-sized computer called Selma, which takes on the visible form of actress Liz Alexander. Selma has the memory of a Cray and a database of unlimited resources. "Selma is a superpower in his pocket. The character is part Mary Poppins, part H.A.L. and part Mr. Spock."

Midkiff's detective also has the ability to "time stall." Explained Bennett, "It's a combination of genetic and alpha wave training of the future. By concentrating and being taught from childhood, he can focus on anything—a man about to throw a knife, for instance—and slow the image received by his brain and thus react faster. Those are his powers."

Rosenberg said his image of Selma, Midkiff's computer helpmate, was British actress Maggie Smith. "She was unavailable," said Bennett. "We looked at a *Who's Who* of great British actresses. Glenda Jackson was running for Parliament so she was not available. We inquired about Lynn Redgrave and Jean Simmons. She was interested but didn't want to move to Australia. We found a lady who is the best we could have had, in my opinion, who looks a little like Julie Andrews in her forties."



Dale Midkiff as detective Darien Lambert, 200 years in the future, with Mia Sara (Ridley Scott's LEGEND) as Elissa, a young scientist caught up in an illicit time travel scheme. Inset: Midkiff's future cop.

Bennett described the relationship of the detective and his computer, which Bennett sees as a key to the series' success. "She doesn't have emotion in the way that Spock works," said Bennett. "Darien says, 'You're upset.' She says, 'I'm incapable of that.' They bicker. Every once in a while she compliments him. He catches her in errors and she gets stacy. It's a wonderful relationship, and it grows with each episode."

"She can do imitations. Insert her under a telephone and she can replicate anyone's voice. She can do the President to get him into Camp David. Selma is his database, his only detective tool, and she's reactive. He must tell her what he wants. She's his lab. Beyond that she's his companion in the strangest of ways. Outside writers have brought stuff in. We say, 'What can Selma do in this episode?' It's keeping us really different."

Other writers contributing to the show after Bennett's two-hour series opener, "A Stranger

In Time" are Harold Gast (GOLDA) and STAR TREK V writer David Loughery, who contributed a western-themed installment. "Darien realizes in contemporary America a chance to live out his fantasy as a US Marshall," said Bennett. "Stuart Whitman plays the Marshall Darien teams up with. They track down a bad guy and he learns to shoot." Also contributing scripts are executive producers Jeff Hayes and Grant Rosenberg, who wrote fifth season's "New Ground" installment of STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION.

The show's hero, Darien Lambert, won't be leaping into any other time periods, neither the past nor the future, for the fear of comparison to other science fiction shows. "We didn't want to be compared to QUANTUM LEAP, which is a very interesting show," said Bennett. "I, as a network executive, did TIME TUNNEL with Irwin Allen. We didn't want to do that kind of show." Noted Rosenberg, "We were

very careful when we created this show to put a time lock on the machine."

The series two-hour opener is budgeted at over \$3 million thanks to Warner Bros ability to distribute the telefilm theatrically overseas and on video. Subsequent one-hour installments will cost considerably less, averaging under \$1 million per episode. Warners have given Nardino an order for a full season of 22 shows, allowing production costs to be amortized. Australian locales are used to double for everything from New York to New Guinea, with the majority of shows set in the US.

Noted Bennett, "The reason I shined to this premise was I had so much fun on STAR TREK IV," conceded Bennett. "The reason it was a success was because all of us were having a ball with the implications of bringing someone back who knows what's going to happen and won't tell and at the same time can't drive a stick shift car, which is a running gag for us. In STAR TREK IV there's a line that Nick Meyer wrote—silly little things stick out as being your favorite—where Kirk and Spock get on a bus and the door opens and then they get off the bus. Spock says, 'What is it, exact change?' And they don't know. That's the fun side of this picture." □

Peter Donat as renegade scientist Mordicai Sahmbi, offering "temporing" pills to Sara to escape to the 20th century.



BAND ON THE RUN

Full Moon video mogul Charles Band on tour to promote his brand.

By Dann Gire

Maybe it's the straightforward, unassuming way he talks to an audience. Maybe it's because he looks like Martin Short's handsome brother. Whatever his appeal, Charles Band has a way of making an impact on an audience, even a group as hard to impress as video retailers. On the road in Chicago to promote his company, Full Moon Entertainment, Band said he intends "to become to fantasy films what Walt Disney is to children's films." And you believe him because *he* believes it. Band's Full Moon has turned out an unbelievable 14 movies in two years. And Band said he has a plan to churn out another 200 movies by the year 2000. This is business and Band means business.

At the age of 39, Band has been hailed as the Roger Corman of the '90s, a shrewd businessman who can produce low-cost films and make them profitable. As the founder and creative force behind Full Moon Entertainment, Band oversees all aspects of his direct-to-video productions and is involved with everything from casting to selecting the box cover art.

"Only 10 percent of the movies released theatrically last year made a profit," said the man who introduced Demi

Moore to the world in a low-budget monster opus called *PARASITE*. "There's no shame in premiering feature films on video."

Dubbed "Band on the Run," Chicago was just one stop on Band's marketing tour scheduled to visit 25 American cities in six months. Besides the *hors d'oeuvres*, Band offered a relatively high-tech stage production. Models from his best-known movies, *DEMONIC TOYS* and the *PUPPET MASTER* series, stood on the stage backed by his own lighting system and an impressive collage of scenes from various Full Moon productions.

"I want to do what Marvel Comics did in the '60s when I read them as a youngster," said Band. "I want Full Moon to become the comic books of the '90s, a series of films with regu-



Band on tour at the Director's Guild Theatre in Los Angeles, awarding Debbie Cartwright of Ontario's Video Palace a role in an upcoming Full Moon production.

lar characters who we can cross over into other series." According to Band, Full Moon's recent release *DOCTOR MORDRID* is really Marvel's *Dr. Strange*. "Oops, should I say that?" joked Band.

Full Moon's long-range projects include horror tales, action/adventure stories and plain fantasy romps. The highlights, according to Band:

- *LURKING FEAR*, based on a Lovecraft story about "the ultimate haunted house."
- *SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH*, which will be directed by Stuart Gordon.
- *ARCADE*, described as a sort of *TRON* for the '90s ("But infinitely more entertaining," Band said.) The idea for the story—about an evil arcade—was developed three years ago. Most of the film was actually shot two years ago, but Full

Moon has taken a long time to get the computerized special effects right. The film will feature "virtual reality" graphics like *THE LAWNMOWER MAN*. *ARCADE* will be released either late this fall or in January of '93.

- *PUPPET MASTER IV: THE MOVIE* is expected to be the first Full Moon production to enjoy a theatrical release before it goes to video. Tim Thomerson will reprise his role as Dollman in this "origin of the Puppet Master" story.

Band said he personally disdains slasher and erotic thrillers, which are the *videos du jour* nationally. "We go for the soft Rs," Band said. "None of my films has any hard edges. With just a few cuts, we could have all PG films. This is important because half of the letters I get are from kids in the 12 to 14 age range."

To complement Full Moon's adult brand of entertainment, Band said his company will unveil in 1993 a new line of video products called Moon Beam Entertainment. "It's like Full Moon lite," said Band. "The films will be PG-rated fantasy pictures. Hopefully, they'll appeal to adults, but they will be films that kids can enjoy." One of the Moon Beam offerings will be *PREHYSTERIA*, a dinosaur movie to compete with the upcoming Warner

continued on page 61

Besides running the company, Band also gets behind the Full Moon cameras, here directing *TRANCERS II*. Band's goal is to be the Walt Disney of the horror field.



FULL MOON'S EFFECTS MASTER

Stop motion specialist David Allen provides the low-budget razzle dazzle.

By Mark Thomas McGee

For more than 20 years effects expert David Allen has worked with producer Charles Band on dozens of fantasy films, a partnership that in many ways could be compared to the one that stop-motion maestro Ray Harryhausen enjoyed with producer Charles H. Schneer. Like Schneer, Band's Full Moon Productions has come to rely on Allen's stop-motion effects to supply the visual magic that often distinguishes his product from other modestly budgeted fare and at a bargain price. David Allen Productions most

recently completed the effects for Full Moon's September video release **DOCTOR MORDRID**, and is currently working on **PREHYSTERIA** and **ROBOT WARS**, with **SUB-SPECIES II** and **III**, currently being shot back to back in Romania by director Ted Nicolaou, looming on the horizon. **SUB-SPECIES II** continues the battle between good and evil vampires. Only this time the fate of the world will be in the hands of a woman.

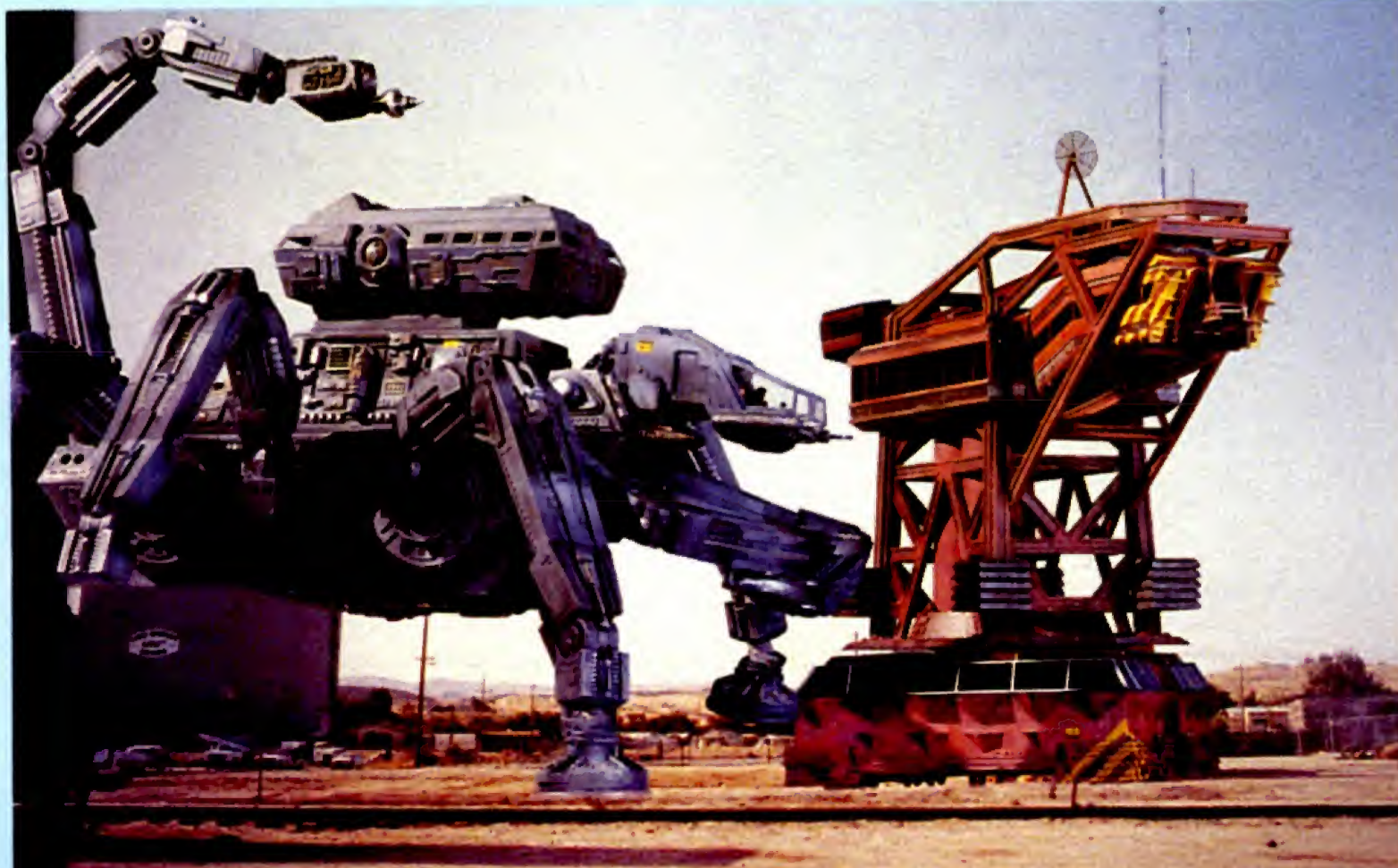
"We're lucky," said the busy Allen with a weary grin. "We were also supposed to be doing **PUPPET MASTER IV**." The sequel was postponed when Paramount, Full Moon's video distributor and production partner, decided it might want to give the project the kind of budget that would lift it out of the video market and turn it into a theatrical release. One idea being bandied about is to combine the evil dolls from **PUPPET MASTER** with the little critters from another recent Full Moon

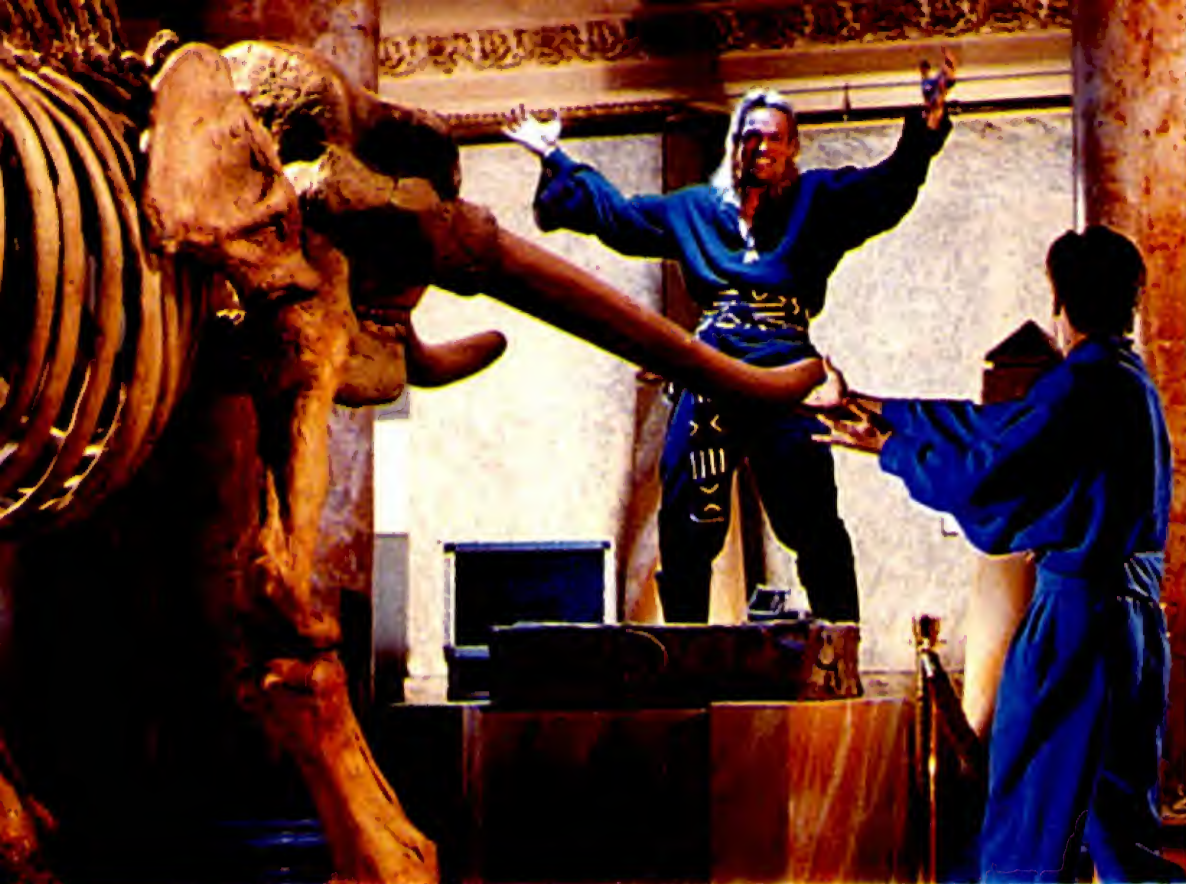


Allen with the animation model of the Mega-1 robot from Full Moon's forthcoming **ROBOT WARS**. Below: The Scorpion-like Scorbots attacks, a sequence animated by Paul Jessel. David Allen Productions provides Band's Full Moon projects with a wide array of effects, not just stop motion, feature quality work at bargain prices.

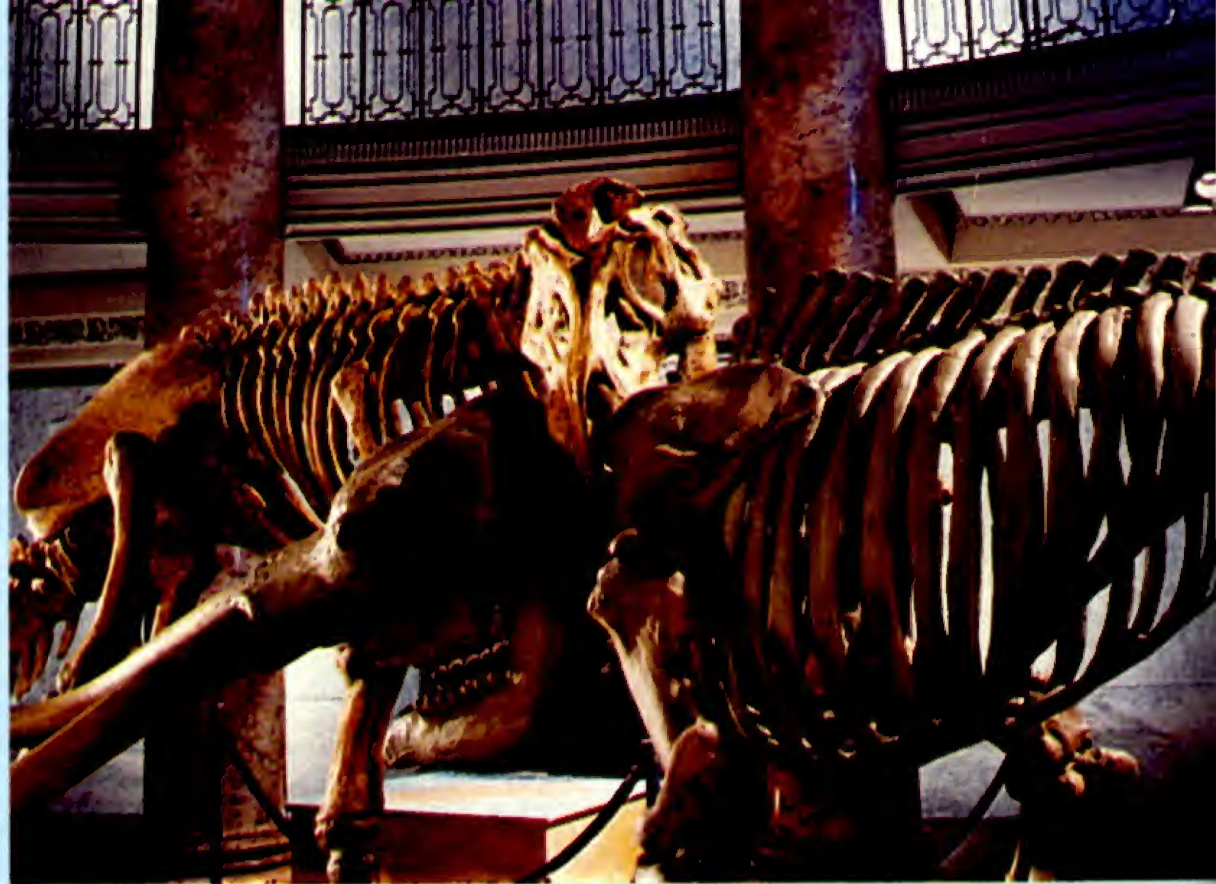


A toy-sized dinosaur for Full Moon's **PREHYSTERIA** video.





The battle of the sorcerers in Full Moon's DR. MORDRID, a museum showdown in which prehistoric skeletons come to life. Below: Filming the shot rear screen.



Dueling dinosaurs. Below: Effects supervisor David Allen goes back to the bones, animating frame by frame in the time-honored tradition of Ray Harryhausen.



release, DEMONIC TOYS, for a sort of effects free-for-all.

Allen's work for DOCTOR MORDRID called for over 100 optical shots, including its spectacular stop-motion duel of the sorcerers finale in which dinosaur skeletons in a museum spring to life to do battle. The sequence, more or less, brings Allen full circle, back to the days when he was 15, working out of his garage in Anaheim, building his first stop-motion puppet . . . a skeleton, inspired by Harryhausen's colorful 7TH VOYAGE OF SINBAD.

After a career of more than 30 years as one of the busiest stop-motion animators in the business, these days Allen likes to leave the animating chores to others. But DOCTOR MORDRID's prohibitively low budget forced Allen back to the bones. Most of what you see in the sequence is Allen's handiwork, and typically, he's still in good form.

Other work in the film, including a box full of people-eating little demons, is the work of veterans Randy Cook, Mark Rapaport, Dennis Gordon and newcomer Chris Endicott, Allen's animation apprentice. With computer graphics dominating the special effects market these days, Endicott said he realizes that he may be entering the field just as the door is closing, but that doesn't seem to bother him. Like his boss, Endicott loves the

hands-on craftsmanship of stop-motion. "They did a Hamburger Helper in computer graphics and it looked terrible," said Endicott, echoing Allen's sentiments. "Computer graphics don't hold as much interest for me, sitting in front of a monitor where anything is possible. Just being able to hold the puppet and squint at it, . . . it's a little more tactile, a little more basic."

As conceived in DOCTOR MORDRID's script, the demons that Endicott and the others helped bring to life were to rise from hell through a vortex, pouring out of a dimensional portal. "Obviously," noted Allen, "that would have been financially prohibitive for us to do." In fact, an audience familiar with Full Moon fare may recognize some of the demons from previous films, though they have been slightly modified. Only one was expressly built for DOCTOR MORDRID, the sort of cannabilizing that is not only common but absolutely vital when you're working on modestly budgeted movies.

"All of the sequences we did were pretty under-budgeted," lamented Allen. "Charles [Band] only has so much money to put these sequences together. It really forces you to be resourceful. At the same time, you want to do work you can show without shame."

Allen's resolve to give each project the loudest possible bang for each buck is shared not only by his staff but by the other companies he works with, in the case of DOCTOR MORDRID, a little outfit called Motion Opticals, located practically around the corner from Allen's Burbank Studios. Owned and operated by Linda Obalil and Jim Stewart, Motion Opticals has supplied the optical effects and titles for practically every Roger Corman film made in the last 10 years. For DOCTOR MORDRID, they employed Kevin Kutchaver, a master of rotoscoped animation effects. One of the biggest problems they faced was trying to decipher exactly what Charles Band



meant when he asked for a scene of "eyes in a starfield," the only glimpse the audience gets of The Monitor, the Yoda of sorcerers. Obalil and Stewart stuck Kutchaver in front of a camera, shot a close-up of his eyes, and matted them into a starfield.

"It's guerilla warfare effects," said Kutchaver, whose fanciful work can be seen in a number of Full Moon epics as well as mega-buck movies like RETURN OF THE JEDI. "You get in, do what you can to make it look nice and get out quick."

More than the usual amount of money has been spent by Band on the design of the robots for his forthcoming ROBOT WARS, inspired by the success of the more ambitious ROBOT JOX, one of the top selling videos of 1991, which Band produced with Allen's effects for his defunct Empire Pictures company. Written by Full Moon veteran Jackson Barr, ROBOT WARS stars Don Michael Paul, Barbara Crampton and James Staley and is being directed by Albert Band, the father of the Full Moon chief. It's another futuristic yarn of battling robots, this time out to rule the world, but unlike their predecessors, the robots in ROBOT WARS can't change their shape. In an effort to cut costs, Allen made use of an existing robot from Band's CRASH AND BURN for one of the close-up mod-

“PREHYSTERIA, in terms of on-set puppet work, is easily the most complicated and sophisticated film Full Moon has ever made.”

- Animator David Allen -

els, revamped of course. Its rival, built from scratch, is a lethal-looking, scorpion-like creation.

In addition to **ROBOT WARS**, David Allen Productions is also working on **FREAKS**, a 20th Century Fox black comedy about a bunch of greedy corporate executives (are there any other kind?) who are sprayed with a curious substance that transforms them all into one giant, ugly shoe. Alex Winter, of **BILL & TED** fame, stars as well as co-directs the lunacy. Allen is supervising effects which will include computer graphics imaging by Pacific Data Institute.

But Full Moon's **PREHYSTERIA** promises to be the most exciting project on Allen's agenda. Several years before Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park* novel and Steven Spielberg's decision to film it made dinosaurs a potentially hot subject in Hollywood once again, a young storyboard artist named Pete Von Sholly was trying to promote interest in his story about *miniature* dinosaurs. As a kid, Von Sholly often fantasized about finding little dinosaurs in his backyard. He persuaded a couple of writers, R. Fry and W. Keith (**BRIDE OF THE RE-ANIMATOR**) to fashion a screenplay based on his fantasy, a script that ultimately caught the attention of New Line Cinema executive Bob Shay. Though New Line ultimately scrapped the project after a rewrite, undaunted Von Sholly took the idea to Charles Band. Since New Line still owned



People-eating little demons unleashed from Hell by the evil sorcerer Kabal in Full Moon's **DR. MORDRID**.

the property, a completely new story has been concocted, using only the miniature dinosaur aspect.

Von Sholly is story-boarding the effects sequences and also acting as the film's executive producer. Von Sholly's wife Andrea sculpted the puppets. "In terms of on-set puppetry, it's easily the most complicated and sophisticated film Full Moon has ever attempted to make," said Allen. "There are five dinosaurs that have to be controlled by off-camera puppeteers. We're talking about a lot of complicated cable-pull mechanisms." Nevertheless, Band has given **PREHYSTERIA** the same kind of short schedule as other Full Moon projects, which has Allen more than a little concerned.

PREHYSTERIA will be directed by Albert Band, with Allen directing second

unit sequences involving the effects work. "I don't have any desire, at this time, to direct films that don't have an effects dimension to them," said Allen, who directed **PUPPET MASTER II** for Full Moon. "I still feel that the dramatic value and the qualitative value of the effects that I do have not been fully explored in any of the pictures that I have ever worked on. If for no other reason than to confirm all of the years I have put into this kind of work, it's very important to me to make a film that takes the sum total of everything I have ever learned in visual effects (which may not be the most technological or modern in terms of my approach to things) and put that knowledge in the service of the story."

Hopefully, **PREHYSTERIA** will give Allen the chance he's been waiting for. □

Two of the dinosaur models for **PREHYSTERIA**, about miniature, toy-sized dinosaurs, an ambitious project that launches Band's Moonbeam video line of PG-rated fare.





TETSUO II, low-budget Japanese auteur Shinya Tsukamoto's color follow-up to the biomechanics of his cult debut.

TETSUO

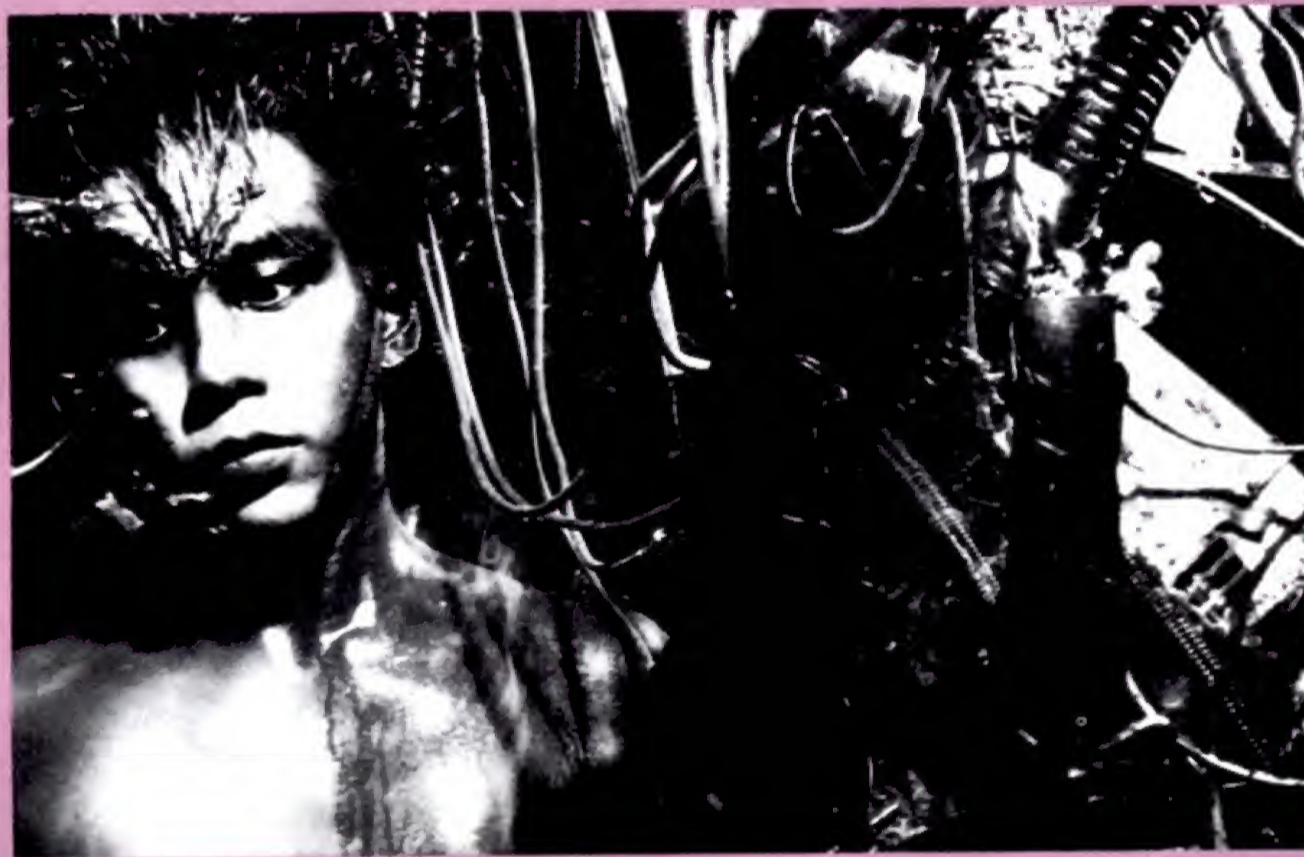
THE IRON MAN

H. R. Giger's biomechanics wedded to the frenetic action of a Sam Raimi.

By Dan Persons

Shinya Tsukamoto and entourage arrived at Original Cinema's offices all smiles and gimmes. A few TOXIC AVENGER stickers adorned their windbreakers; blow-up renditions of the Avenger's mutated mug were clasped in their hands. It seemed that, before heading downtown for this appointment, the group—including Tsukamoto and actress Nobu Kanaoko—had made a pilgrimage to New York's Hell's Kitchen, home of Troma Inc. There, they'd had an audience with head schlockmeister Lloyd Kaufman, whom Tsukamoto met during one of Kaufman's frequent trips to Japan and who subsequently provided a typically Kaufmanesque quote for the Tsukamoto publicity package, "Shinya Tsukamoto is really a genius. I think he is going to be the world's greatest film director."

Such a meeting of minds really wasn't too bizarre. Troma's TOXIC AVENGER is very much the hot item in Japan, while Tsukamoto lays claim to having created his country's first, native-born



Writer, producer, director and effects artist Shinya Tsukamoto in his role as the "metals fetishist" in TETSUO: THE IRON MAN. Like Detroit's Raimi, Tsukamoto began low-budget and self-financed.

cult title, TETSUO: THE IRON MAN. But while Kaufman has been polluting the minds of receptive young filmgoers for well over a decade, the 32-year-old Tsukamoto is only just nurturing hopes that his film—recently released in the U.S. by Original Cinema and bearing about as much resemblance to a Troma production as a David Lynch film does to THE LOVE BOAT—will be merely the first to have the same brain-rattling effect on unsuspecting Americans.

Tsukamoto comes to film through the tried-and-true

path of late 20th-century auteurs: Super-8 home-brews that started at the age of 14 and public exposure not long after—in this case, screenings of his films on the TV show GINZA NOW. He moved into commercial production immediately after college, directing spots for Nikon and Canon, amongst others. By 1985, he'd had his fill of 60-second drama and left the commercial house to concentrate on his own work, the first being the intriguingly titled Super-8 short, THE PHANTOM OF REGULAR SIZE.

TETSUO, a continuation of Tsukamoto's REGULAR SIZE MONSTER series, began production in 1988. "I was pretty much impressed by [David] Cronenberg's VIDEO-DROME," the director said, via his interpreter. "Then the cyberpunk movement came along. I saw many articles on the movement—which was about the assimilation of the flesh and the material, particularly the iron. I was haunted by this idea. That's the reason I wanted to make TETSUO."

Tsukamoto gathered together members of the Kaijyu Theatre, a group he and his friends had formed in high school (most of whom would serve double and triple duty before and behind the camera). He cast Tomoroh Taguchi, lead singer of the rock group Bachikaburi (rough translation: "You Are Being Punished"—alternative translation "Don't Expect Michael Bolton to Cover These Songs Anytime Soon")—in the crucial role of the Salaryman, invested five million yen of his own savings and began shooting in 16mm black-and-white.

The initial production was prototypical shoe-string. Tsu-

kamoto and company shot interiors in the suburbs of Tokyo, and exteriors at the decrepit Kawaguchi iron factory north of the city—often without official permission (and occasionally with the vigorous protests of watchful neighbors). Shooting ratios were spare, rarely rising above 1:1. When Tsukamoto had to appear on screen (as the Metals Fetishist), he would set up his shot, and then let actress Kei Fujiwara (who played the Salaryman's girlfriend) operate the camera.

"It was during the winter when we were shooting," said Tsukamoto. "We were all freezing. On top of that, when we moved from interiors to our exteriors, we had to take a train to the factory, which was very far away and we couldn't take our makeup off. People would look at us like we were crazy.

"It wasn't really problematic to the actors, though, because we were having fun. Originally, we thought this film would be a parody. Because it only had to be one take, we ended up doing a more exaggerated, over-acted style, which is easier."

Where the fun stopped was at the end of a shooting day, when Taguchi had to divest himself of his junkyard body-suit. "You had to put all the metal onto the actor with tape," said Tsukamoto. "I

Love among the mutating, Japanese rock musician Taguchi as the Salaryman and Fujiwara as the girlfriend.



TSUKAMOTO'S NEW FLESH

"I was impressed by David Cronenberg's VIDEODROME and the cyberpunk movement. I was haunted by the idea of flesh assimilating iron. That was the impetus for TETSUO."



Tsukamoto gives new meaning to the term "well endowed," as Kei Fujiwara regards the new appendage erupting from Tomoroh Taguchi as the Salaryman.

didn't really think how hard it would be for him to be wearing this, which would really hurt when it was taken off. That part was difficult, not for me, but for Taguchi. I was concerned about him when I was taking off all the things from his body, because he was really screaming. So I let Kei Fujiwara handle that part. I couldn't do it myself; couldn't bear to see him in pain."

In spite of the tender flesh—and a briefly ticklish moment when the final mammoth incarnation of the Iron Man (incorporating both Tsukamoto and Taguchi in one, mobile suit) was built without concern for the electrical lines suspended over the location—Tsukamoto managed to wrap his show in four months. He spent another eight months shooting pickups, fortified with a loan from his former employers to cover lab costs and an additional eight million yen supplied by Japan Home Video after a screening of a rough cut. In the end, TETSUO: THE IRON MAN's budget hewed to cult-film standards, about \$100,000—Roger Corman couldn't have done better.

With Tsukamoto's com-

pany handling the film's theatrical release, TETSUO premiered in 1989, at what the director claimed was "the smallest theatre in Tokyo." Buoyed by the publicity following the film's win at the Rome Fantastic Film Festival, TETSUO ran in Tokyo for three months of "late" shows (9:00 p.m.—the Japanese equivalent of a midnight run) and for a year in other cities. "This is quite rare in the Japanese film community," said Tsukamoto. "We really don't have such things as cult films."

While Tsukamoto was undeniably pleased with the way things turned out, he still admitted to some dissatisfaction with the decisions his limited budget forced him into. "For certain scenes, if I'd had more money, I would have been able to create the vision I originally wanted. I had to change certain scenes—I wouldn't say it was a compromise, but I had to think very hard to create the image that I originally wanted. Towards the end, when the Salaryman's house was metalized, I wanted to show the scene with a long take and long-shot, but it was impossible. So I shot bits

of the interior, with the drawer metalized and the cat metalized, that kind of thing, and edited it together to catch the speed. If I were in Hollywood, I could do it with all the computers and technology. But I didn't have that kind of technology or money."

Technology and money, however, may be becoming less of a problem. Tsukamoto has already followed up on his first feature's success, making the transition to 35mm with HIRUKO, THE GOBLIN, and then observing time-honored film industry tradition with last year's release of TETSUO II: THE BODY HAMMER. The latter feature, described in its publicity as a film about "a man whose body turns into a gun when seized by his own, uncontrollable rage," is obviously less a sequel than a further exploration of its predecessor's themes.

"In TETSUO," said Tsukamoto, "I was concentrating on creating a sensual image, on showing the relationship between the metal—the material—and the flesh—the body. That was my main concern. In TETSUO II, I wanted to broaden the perspective. I came up with the idea that it's the relationship between the big city—urban society—versus the human body, while the relationship between metal and flesh remains. These two themes are synchronized, so the motive of the film becomes the end of the world, that feeling. That's TETSUO II."

Presently, Tsukamoto is shopping TETSUO II around to various American distributors (that trip to Troma may have been far more than a courtesy visit). Meanwhile, Original Cinema has said that, if no one else will pick up the film, they'll handle it. Upcoming may be a TETSUO photo book and TETSUO graphic novels—in short, all the cult-film accoutrements. That seemed to suit Tsukamoto perfectly. "You see the film," he said, summing up his work's effect, "and if you don't like it, you just *hate* it. Those who couldn't take it left in the middle of screenings. But it created a cult, we had audiences coming back ten times, twenty times." □

CHEAP GENIUS

Tsukamoto's biomechanics welcome humanity to its place on the scrapheap.

By Dan Persons

Boundlessly frenetic and enthusiastically gross, TETSUO: THE IRON MAN summons up every genre imaginable, from old Theda Bara vehicles to ERASER-HEAD to the campiest of the GODZILLA VS... series. A neat, filmic hat-trick for writer/director/star Shinya Tsukamoto, to be sure, but there's more to the souped-up horror tale than conceptual dazzle.

Watch closely—there *is* a plot here. Having accidentally run down a "Metals Fetishist" (Tsukamoto) in the midst of holy communion with a bit of corrugated pipe, a strait-laced "Salaryman" (Tomoh Taguchi) finds himself cursed by the mutated pawns of the Fetishist's wrath and tortured at home by dreams of industrial rape. Salaryman eventually finds himself metamorphosed into the titular Iron Man—a veritable junkyard explosion of sheet metal, building fixtures and household appliances. Trapped in a state that renders him little more than a formless, ever-mutating mountain, he must face down the risen Fetishist, who has transformed himself into a jet-propelled angel of vengeance and has set himself on an evolutionary path that doesn't so much lead to Charles Darwin as it does to William Gibson.

There's a lot here to suggest H.R. Giger's notions of biomechanics, but TETSUO brings the Swiss artist's concepts down to real-world scale, without the petro-industrial sheen that gives the Giger vision its distinct, alien beauty. Tsukamoto's characters worship a different brand of biomech god, one to whom decay is just as dear as development, one quite ready to welcome humanity to a place on the scrap heap. The consumations become appropriately visceral: resis-

tors sprout from Salaryman's face and burst like blood-filled zits. His mutation includes the advent of a rotating, auger-like appendage that brings new meaning to the term "fully equipped."

Within this world, Salaryman's incapacity to combat his transformation becomes understandable. As in real life, it's not so much that Tsukamoto's society is incapable of battling the rise of such a junkyard deity, as that they can't bring themselves even to acknowledge the scourge's existence. ("Think of it as jewelry," says a disinterested doctor to the scrap-bedecked Salaryman, summoning to mind all the corporate spokespersons who have ever dismissed environmental protesters with cheap rationalizations and promises of new career paths in the toxic waste disposal industry.)

The budget—or lack of it—clearly shows, but that's more to TETSUO's advantage than might be expected. Tsukamoto's stark, black-and-white photography lends a heightened gruesomeness to the proceedings, with the contrast of shiny-black blood against luminous, grey-white flesh more disturbing than if everything had been rendered in Eastmancolor's rainbow palette. Special effects—largely of the home-brewed, pixilated variety—

Toguchi as Tsukamoto's cursed Everyman, a horror tale with a high concept.



Fujiwara with Toguchi's Salaryman, mutating into the titular Iron Man, a junkyard explosion of sheet metal, building fixtures and home appliances.

give the film a manic, did-I-see-that quality, while the haste with which filming took place only serves to up the show's tempo.

And maybe that's something to consider. TETSUO is as sprightly an action film as has crossed the screen in many a summer. It used to be that Hollywood could crank out at least one of these things every year (remember the adrenaline rush of the *original* TERMINATOR?). Nowadays, we have to make do with ponderous, over-budgeted no-brainers larded with stars who barely have the wherewithal to speak their lines. That TETSUO catches a lost spirit of pure, kinetic filmmaking is to

its credit. That it also has a few sardonic thoughts bouncing around within its head is a bonus. In interview, Tsukamoto regretted that lack of money prevented him from bringing some of his more elaborate visions to the screen. I'm frankly glad he was forced to make do with what he had—where the wallet falls short, the brain takes over, and Tsukamoto has brains enough to make TETSUO fly despite its shortfalls. There's no dearth of imagination here and that's worth more than countless exploding automobiles. □

REVIEWS

No graveyard shift enlivens this second generation cadaver

PET SEMATARY TWO

A Paramount release. 8/92, 100 mins. In Dolby and color. Director, Mary Lambert. Producer, Ralph Singleton. Director of photography, Russell Carpenter. Editor, Tom Finan. Production designer, Michelle Minch. Art director, Karen Steward. Second unit director/mechanical and special effects, Peter Chesney. Special effects makeup and animatronics, Steve Johnson. Dead animal effects, Bill (Splat) Johnson. Costume designer, Marlene Stewart. Music, Mark Governor. Sound, Shirley Libby. Screenplay by Richard Outten.

| | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| Jeff Matthews | Edward Furlong |
| Chase Matthews | Anthony Edwards |
| Gus Gilbert | Clancy Brown |
| Clyde | Jared Rushton |
| Renee Hallow | Darlanne Fluegel |
| Amanda Gilbert | Lisa Waltz |
| Drew Gilbert | Jason McGuire |
| Marjorie Hargrove | Sarah Trigger |

by Thomas Doherty

"I don't wanna be buried/in a pet cem-e-ter-y," sang the Ramones, in the memorable title tune to the fast-fade-to-oblivion film version of Stephen King's paperback. The Maine Man's imprimateur appears nowhere near the sequel, not necessarily a bad sign, but at least the Ramones are back with "Poison Heart," another great tune to hum along with the ersatz terror. Otherwise, no graveyard shift enlivens a second generation cadaver best left interred.

As in the original, a badly lit New England backwater is home to an ancient Indian burial mound where the corpses just won't stay put. Plant an animal companion in the rejuvenating soil and pretty soon it's raining zombie cats and dogs. Further up the food chain, resurrection of dead humans and their post-mortem eradication also proceeds in accord with the universal laws for behavior among the living dead—namely, 1) dirt plus deceased equals instant Lazarus and 2) kill the brain and you kill the ghoul.

The sequel opens with a DePalmian tease. On a cheapo soundstage, the fright movie within a fright movie is in progress. Actress Rene Hallow is emoting for the camera when a clumsy grip—scratch that, *gaffer*—knocks over a control board and electrocutes the lady during her big scene. Understandably traumatized by mother's sizzling exit, her worshipful son Jeff (Edward Furlong, from *TERMINATOR 2*, and growing up fast) is sent to live with his veterinarian Dad (Anthony Edwards) back in the Pine Tree State. Jeff's new environs bear all



Edward Furlong as Jeff and Jason McGuire as Drew, taking Drew's beloved Zowie to the Pet Sematary for resurrection, the horror of stepkids and broken homes.

the trappings of small town Kingdom—neanderthal law enforcement officials, vicious young punks and surrounding woodlands steeped in Gothic lore. The chief two-legged menace is Gus (Clancy Brown), local sheriff and brutal lunkhead, who torments his chunky stepson Drew (Jason McGuire), who in turn takes lonely solace in the affections of his husky canine buddy, Zowie.

Jeff and Drew form an unlikely friendship, probably because they're the only kids in their junior high school devoid of sociopathic blood lust. Jeff remains inconsolable about Mom's shocking departure, his grief a rich source of harassing humor for his insensate classmates. Poor Drew, though, has the more immediate problem with his all-too-alive stepdad, who paws his airhead Mom, rations his caloric intake and barks louder than Zowie.

So far, so listless. Perhaps realizing what dead meat she's serving up on screen, director Mary Lambert opts for the splatter strategy mid-picture. Shredded bunnies, torn kittens and ripped faces spread chunks of ligament across the *mise en scene*. When the demon Zowie takes a bite out of crime by chomping the sheriff's neck, the distraught boys—hey, it worked with Zowie!—decide to bury him in the Indian cemetery. Of course, to paraphrase Robert

Zemeckis, death becomes him—a guy like Gus was born to be a homicidal zombie. Soon he's skinning rabbits by hand, shoveling heaping helpings of food down his throat, and friskily assaulting the Mrs. Ironically, once he's terminated as a character, Clancy Brown comes alive as an actor. Frothing mashed potatoes and chortling at the top of his lungs, he's rabidly hilarious as a nightmare patriarch.

Meanwhile, the world's dumbest vet finally figures out that something's, well, *wrong* about an animated dog with no pulse and glowing eyes. But Dad's medical alert comes too late for Jeff, who has himself gone over the deep end. About twelve steps behind the audience, he finally hits on the idea of exhuming Mom and depositing her in Indian heaven. Needless to say, being dead works certain unpleasant personality changes in the mother he knew and loved. After a botched oedipal reunion, a climactic conflagration puts the pet cemetery alumni and the *PET SEMETARY* spectators out of their misery.

Director Mary Lambert is the MTV auteur responsible for Madonna's iconic video incarnations ("Material Girl," "Papa Don't Preach" and "Open Your Heart"). Lambert made her first transition from four-minute vignettes to feature-length drama in

SIESTA (1987), a totally incoherent thriller which not even parading the charms of a totally naked Ellen Barkin could redeem. She scored next time out in the seemingly unlikely format of B-level Stephen King—the girl aided materially by a top-notch exploitation campaign and soft seasonal competition. Strangely, little of the energy and wit—not to say sexiness—of Lambert's rock video work is on display in either of her horror outings. Neither film has elements that differentiate it from a dozen or so other King-inspired knockoffs. Also, since the planet was not exactly clamoring for another visit to the *PET SEMETARY*, the budget for the sequel must have been frugal. Visually, the film looks cheap and grainy and the effects have the cost-efficient look of a straight-to-video project. Or maybe Lambert blew her production allocations on crane rental—she deploys more descending crane shots than *SCTV*'s Johnny LaRue.

Notwithstanding, as a commentary on the modern child's hassles with step-relations and separated parents in a culture of broken homes and mixed-up familial relations, *PET SEMATARY TWO* approaches coherence. Where the first installment focused on the parents' anxiety about their children, the second shifts the vantage to the kids' anxiety about their parents. Drew's stepdad from the *Brothers Grimm* and Jeff's thwarted hope that his separated parents will get back together register more than the unethical treatment of their animals. In fact, of the two boys, Drew is more compelling than the nominal lead. Actor McGuire, chubby and woebe-gone, steals the film from the stiffly handsome Furlong. He is the very image of the overweight and socially maladroit kid, a born reject whose best friend can only be his dog. (To be fair, Furlong catches fire in the final third of the film when he succumbs to oedipal dementia. He'd make a good Damien.) Still, Drew carries more than his share of the emotional weight and his filmic fate—pursued by Gus, he and Mom get squashed in a head-on collision with a truck—seems unduly rude.

continued on page 61

PET SEMATARY TWO

From Stephen King to Madonna, directing Mary Lambert style.

By Patricia Ross

"My job is to force or entice people into confronting their fears." Mary Lambert is a director with a mission. She has a clear and creative vision of what she wants to accomplish in her films, and she is articulate and determined to succeed. Although her biggest monetary success has been in the horror genre, she is not by any means exclusively a "low-budget horror director."

Lambert received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design. As co-owner of a film graphics studio, she co-produced *RAPID EYE MOVEMENTS*, an award-winning experimental short film. Her Hollywood work in sound editing and computer/film graphics gave her a solid foundation for her work to come.

Lambert is an ACE Award nominee and a Clio-winning

commercial director. In addition, she has directed numerous music videos, working with *femmes fatales* of note such as Madonna and Janet Jackson, and male superstars Sting and Mick Jagger.

However, the themes of her life, death and the unknown hereafter, continue to pervade all her film projects to date. In 1986 Lambert made her directorial debut with the controversial *SIESTA*, in which a young woman has to deal with the reality of her own violent death and subsequent evidence of her eternal life.

With *PET SEMATARY* in 1990, Lambert scored an unexpected hit in a horror arena inundated with cheap tricks. Though there was no lack of gore in the original film, its fable-like setting whispered allegory and held a moral in the end. "I had this simplistic picture in my mind from the very first moment," said Lambert of the forerunner of the new



Jared Rushton as *PET SEMATARY TWO*'s teenager back from the grave, facing Lambert's fiery retribution, a take on horror as old-fashioned morality play.

sequel. "Sort of gothic . . . the mother, father, son, cat . . . the hill in the background and the road. That was their *whole world*. The parents, through their negligence, were the instruments in the death of their son."

Lambert likes working in the horror genre and is not opposed to sending a message. "I think all good horror films are morality plays," she said. "If you do the wrong thing, you get punished. Most people try very hard not to confront their fears on a day to day basis. Going to a horror film allows you to do that and be entertained at the same time."

In *GRAND ISLE*, shown on cable's TNT, Lambert continued her thematic tradition. "It is taken from the late 19th-century novella, *The Awakening*," she said. "It is about a young woman's spiritual awakening. Yet in some ways, it too is very much a morality tale. She deviates from the path that's designed and set for her, and she is punished."

Lambert said she wasn't phased by detractors of her horror work. "There are always going to be people who act out against the material. And if there are a few people out there who hate you, then you're doing something right. You're disturbing them. You're causing a reaction."

Lambert has directed several of Madonna's most notorious music videos, including *LIKE A PRAYER*, which some critics labeled sacrilege. "Madonna always has something she wants

to get across," Lambert said thoughtfully. "I'm always inspired by her music. We talk about it and I write the concept. It's all in the collaboration. She'll ask *me* to direct. She's not a control *freak* in that sense of the word. She takes input from other people. But, she always has a clear idea of the direction she wants to go in. She's a joy to work for that reason. She's . . . like a prayer."


Noted Lambert's *PET SEMATARY II* producer, Ralph Singleton, "If she were a man, she'd have had a three-picture deal after her last success." That she doesn't, does not seem to daunt her.

"I have some things that I'm trying to get going right now," said Lambert. "One is a bit of a psycho sexual thriller, more along the lines of *SIESTA* than the *PET SEMATARY* films. But that project is not contemporary. I have three or four *pet* projects that I'm doing." □

Lambert's unflinching horror view: Darlanne Fluegel in makeup by Steve Johnson's XFX, horror's just desserts.



Lambert and camera operator Tony Cutrano, directing *PET SEMATARY TWO*.



A laserdisc or VCR can't do justice to the incandescent special effects of Douglas Trumbull.

BLADE



Ridley Scott's director's cut, a vision

By Thomas Doherty

Ever since Irving Thalberg took his hedge clippers to the eight-hour version of Erich Von Stroheim's epic *GREED* (1924), the legend of the devoted auteur whose artistic vision is vitiated and violated by insensitive studio weasels has been a staple of Hollywood lore. Think of Orson Welles and his tormentors at RKO, Sergio Leone and his stateside distrib-

utors, and Francis Ford Coppola and himself. Yet in a motion picture market where laserdisc and "special edition" videocassette packages add footage, outtakes and commentary to theatrical films, where the ready availability of alternative endings and cutting room floor footage make for easy critical comparison, where indeed the variety of wraparound material challenges the very notion of a "definitive edition" of a film, the prosaic truth seems to be that most directors are so hopelessly in love with their own footage that an independent eye is necessary as a disinterested gauge of spectator tolerance. With most directorial "final cuts" running at least fifteen minutes too long, the special editions are, more often than not, bulky and bloated. They are well served by a judicious paring.

Ten years after its original release, a director's cut of Ridley Scott's *BLADE RUNNER* (1982) has been granted a theatrical re-release by Warner Bros. As any reader of this magazine knows, *BLADE RUNNER* has precious few rivals for impact and influence among SF films in the post-2001 era—maybe James Cameron's *TERMINATORS*, John Carpenter's *THE THING* (1982), and Scott's own *ALIEN* (1979). Rumors of the film's desecration at the myopic caprice of boardroom butchers have circulated for years, Scott himself spreading more than a few during interviews and film school appearances. By most

accounts, the two unwelcome editorial contributions that stuck most in his craw were the universally reviled voice-over narration from the film's existentially spent protagonist and the gushy get-away ending where blade runner Deckard and replicant Rachael drive off into the sunlight (footage lifted from *THE SHINING*).

Widely anticipated at the time of its release—it cost then a big-budget \$15 million and Scott was hot off the glow from *ALIEN*—*BLADE RUNNER* was definitely a commercial and in part a critical disappointment. Surely everyone with working eyeballs was thrilled at the sheer sumptuous spectacle conjured by Scott, "visual futurist" Syd Mead, and FX *eminence gris* Douglas Trumbull. The term "production design" didn't quite do credit to the self-contained, finely detailed dystopia, a wholly original projection that sketched the formal outlines to what was not then called cyberpunk. Every dime was on the screen and the total look was a cinematic leap forward on a par with none other than 2001. But if the visual feast was awe-inspiring, the story was ragged and off-putting, the exposition as muddled as the *noirish* atmospherics. And that narration was intolerable—Harrison Ford sounded like he was on thorazine, enunciating bad Raymond Chandler in a desensitized tone meant to sound eloquently burnt out yet was mainly to cringe for. (For instructive contrast, check out the

way Linda Hamilton's spooky voice-over anchors *TERMINATOR 2*.)

Despite the boxoffice nosedive and mixed response, however, the film's presence was tenacious—revival screenings were always well-attended, no one who saw it could forget it and its stylistic influence spanned everything from fashion layouts to rock videos. Without the *BLADE RUNNER* precedent, it would be hard to imagine the industrial *noir* of *BRAZIL* and *ALIENS* or the tech *noir* of James Cameron and Paul Verhoeven. The film improved with repeated viewings, gained in reputation and looked better with age.

Thus even had Warners done nothing but strike new 35mm prints, the re-release of *BLADE RUNNER* would deserve an all points bulletin on the SF wavelength. Back in high definition in 2.35 widescreen, the film is a gorgeous wonder. The full impact of the colors and scenic details, the *noirish* lighting and textured *chiaroscuro*, is simply indiscernible on VCR or laserdisc. Images that haunted the electric sleep of a generation are still intact and still hypnotic—the stunning opening shot of a nighttime LA skyline circa 2020, fire explosions over the cityscape, the billowing flames reflected in a free-floating iris, the architectural aesthetic favoring leaky buildings with ancient elevators and rotting floorboards, city planning that brings the Ginza to main-



Where were you in '82? If you missed our 28-page cover story on the making of Ridley Scott's *BLADE RUNNER*, you can still order your copy toll-free by phone, or by using the coupon on page 63. Includes interviews with Scott and effects expert Doug Trumbull.



BLADE RUNNER

LA as a polluted wasteland of multicultural chaos and random criminality. What wild imaginations!

of the future that's still a revelation.

street USA, and the vital intensity of replicant *Übermensch* Roy Batty.

As a painterly vision of the future and a cyberpunk fashion statement, the film has style to burn. Rutger Hauer's retro-punk flash, Daryl Hannah's gothic look, and Sean Young, dolled up like a *femme fatale* mannequin, struck widely imitated poses. In a reflection of contemporaneous (and as it turned out prophetic) paranoia about American economic decline, the invasive influence of the Japanese is a dominant, disorienting motif. Geisha girls and neon kanji loom over the city from advertising screens urging emigration to the "off world." Given the quality of life in the host city, one wonders why anyone remains behind. Has any SF premonition ever matched *BLADE RUNNER*'s bleak flash forward, where Los Angeles has become a polluted, acid-rainswept wasteland, chest deep in carbon monoxide, beset by metropolitan decay, multicultural chaos and random criminality? What wild imaginations!

For all the hoopla, the director's cut isn't that much different from the studio's splice. Harrison Ford's mumbling is gone and the ending is a bit more equivocal, but the narrative itself is the same and the thematic textures haven't changed. The loss of the despised voice-over has one unexpected consequence, however. As gratifying as they were, Deckard's mus-



Scott directs Harrison Ford as blade runner Deckard, casting that didn't work.

ings provided guidance and lent the affectless blade runner an interior depth. Without his saying so, Ford's Deckard registers very little. The interior monologue at least gave some indication of an animated human behind his own dispassionate eyes. Of course, this is the point of the film.

By 2019—not to say 1982 or 1992—the real "skin jobs" are the humans. Tyrell Corporation's motto of the Nexus 6 line captures the ethos: "more human than human." Having been weaned on and educated by the original version and thus having benefited from its emotional and expository cues (Deckard's remorse at the "retirement" of snake-lady Zhora, the untranslated street lingo) it's

difficult to conjure how the virgin viewer would respond to the "director's cut" cold. For at the film's core, there is a real problem with the title character. The "desensitized human/vibrant replicant" conceit probably read well on the page, but on screen *BLADE RUNNER* needs a point of identification to carry the drama. Though Deckard is on screen a long time, we have no clues to what makes him tick.

Since Deckard comes off as such a stiff, spectators are only too willing to transfer affection to the rascally replicant Roy Batty. Rutger Hauer, in the days when he was lean and mean, steals the movie as a Nietzschean superman unwilling to accept his prepro-

grammed death. The then-unfamiliar cast of supporting players—Joanna Cassidy as the exotic dancer Zhora, James Edward Olmos as the back-up blade runner with an origami habit, Brion James as the slow-witted, lumbering Leon and M. Emmet Walsh as Deckard's gruff superior—is a class act all around.

Oddly, neither version of *BLADE RUNNER* attempts to incorporate the starkest moment of mind-twisting metaphysics from Philip K. Dick's source novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*—the juncture when reader and narrator alike suddenly realize that Deckard too might be a Nexus 6 replicant.

In sum, the reason to see the new, maybe-improved, maybe-not *BLADE RUNNER* is less to gauge differences between the two versions than to refresh memories and to re-experience a SF landmark in its original format. As far as length goes, the official running time of the re-release is 115 minutes, though my watch clocked it as slightly longer. The running time of the 1982 version was 118 minutes and the videocassette version logged in at 123 minutes. The director's cut is thus actually a bit shorter than the original—which may make Ridley Scott the only director in Hollywood history who cuts more of his footage than the studio. But whichever version becomes the standard edit, any way they slice it, *BLADE RUNNER* is all prime cut. □

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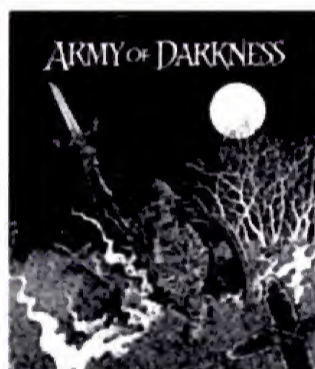
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FILM RATINGS

- Must See
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Poor

AMITYVILLE 1992 IT'S ABOUT TIME

Directed by Tony Randel. Republic Home Video. 8/92, 95 mins. With: Stephen Macht, Shawn Weatherly, Megan Ward.

This falls somewhere between the logically linked and the artificially created video sequels, since it doesn't take place on Long Island and has no direct plot or character link to its predecessors, but it is *not* an unrelated film with a series title pasted on it. Stephen Macht buys a demonic clock from "the" Amityville house and brings it to his California home. Bad move—the clock brings out the evil side of Macht and his nubile daughter (Megan Ward). Fairly slick and fast-moving, the film falls down because it is so predictable. When it finally tries to break the possessed-person-becomes-killer psycho (as for Ward, psychoslut) mold, it ventures into a brief but confusing time-warp mode. Production values are good, special effects competent but not breathtaking. Fair entertainment, but hardly memorable.

● David Wilt

BRAIN DEAD

Directed by Peter Jackson. Wingnut Films. 7/92, 101 mins. With: Timothy Balme, Diana Penalver, Elizabeth Moody.

After putting New Zealand on the gore map with *BAD TASTE* and *MEET THE FEEBLES*, director Peter Jackson churns up his most hilariously demented splattertoon. After a rabid Sumatran Rat Monkey bites a snooping old bat, her hopelessly devoted mama's boy must lock his rapidly zombifying parent in the cellar. When the flesh-eating bodies begin to pile up, he tries to assemble an unholy nuclear family, keeping doped-up ghouls at the dinner table and taking their hell-spawned baby out to play with the other kids. But then more



Lionel (Timothy Balme) injects his dead mom with animal stimulant for the zombie orgy climax of *BRAIN DEAD*, directed by New Zealand gore auteur Peter Jackson.

fresh meat arrives for the ultimate dead man's party.

Jackson's demonic creativity goes far beyond finding new ways to slice, dice and puree the human body. With a rollercoaster camera and outrageous plot, Jackson's frenzied direction makes him the gonzo horror auteur to watch out for. But while his over-the-stratosphere splatter makes Sam Raimi look like Walt Disney, the film's bite comes from its anarchic humor, the highlights ranging from a kung-fu priest to zombie necrophilia, climaxing with a giant, undead hag that only a son could love. While most sane audiences will go for their barf bags, fans who are attuned to Jackson's unhinged wavelength will be thirsting for more lunacy from the gorehound down under.

●●● Daniel Schweiger

INNOCENT BLOOD

Directed by John Landis. Warner Bros. 9/92, 112 mins. With: Anne Parillaud, Robert Loggia, Anthony LaPaglia, Don Rickles.

Anne Parillaud plays an exotic female vampire who decides to feast on Italians and ends up putting the bite on

Robert Loggia, head of a mafioso crime family. Anthony LaPaglia is the stupidly exposed undercover cop who is doggedly determined in his pursuit of Loggia and who begins to fall for the vamp. More entertaining than most vampire comedies, director John Landis also throws in some decent shocks and special effects. While not as wildly funny as Landis' *AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON*, it is also not as wildly uneven, though Landis' penchant for car crashes is still evident.

Parillaud delights as a sexy, blood-sucking seductress on the prowl as does Loggia as the don who considers himself a "made man" who wants to pass along his powers to his "family." Landis ignores the mythology of crosses and mirrors, but otherwise, stays true to the vampire tradition. Cameos by Tom Savini, Sam Raimi, Dario Argento and others provide fun for knowledgeable fans.

●● Dennis Fischer

PROM NIGHT IV: DELIVER US FROM EVIL

Directed by Clay Borris. Live Home Video. 9/92,

93 mins. With: James Carver, Nikki deBoer, Alden Kane, Joy Tanner, Alle Ghadban.

After the obligatory flashback opening, this snorer is punctuated by a few brief nude sequences, before its drawn-out ho-hum hack 'em up confrontation. Father Joshua (James Carver) kills a pair of necking teens in 1957, and for this infraction, he's walled up by the Church for 33 years and kept in a medically induced coma in the belief he's possessed by a demon. The night he wakes up just happens to be prom night, his weapon of choice: a sharpened crucifix. There's nothing connecting this made-in-Canada cheapie with any of the previous *PROM NIGHT* entries, although the name of Jamie Lee Curtis is invoked as a joke.

○ Judith Harris

TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME

Directed by David Lynch. New Line Cinema. 8/92, 134 mins. With: Sheryl Lee, Kyle MacLachlan, Kiefer Sutherland.

David Lynch'll have to work *real* hard to make up for this one. By choosing to depict the last seven days of Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee), the director places himself at a double disadvantage: not only do we know how the film's going to end, most of us have imagined things for those days that are far more interesting than anything presented here. Worse, Lynch does nothing to enlighten us with the why's of what happened, choosing instead to recapitulate, in graphic detail, events that needed no illumination to begin with. Neither completely experimental nor a total sell-out, the film is humorless and mean-spirited—it's enough to make you wish that Lynch would abandon his drive to become the first, true crossover cult filmmaker and go back to the more rarified strangeness of his earlier work. Fans of Kyle MacLachlan, Kiefer Sutherland and Chris Isaak should be advised that the actors only show up in the extended prologue—actually the only worthwhile 30 minutes in the entire film. Better to rent *BLUE VELVET* and watch it while having some cherry pie and coffee.

○ Dan Persons

Boxoffice Survey: Horror Leads Genre Take, Off Last Year's Third Quarter Pace

An analysis of the Top Grossing films, as reported in *Variety's* "Weekend Boxoffice Report" reveals that in the first three quarters of 1992, revenue from horror, fantasy and science fiction (30.5% of all films) accounted for 33.8% of all money earned at the boxoffice (35.5% last year), a slight dip in the genre's market share, despite a 14% increase in genre titles released.

Perhaps thanks to *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*, there has been a 37% increase in horror films. Revenues are up 19% from last year's record take. Fantasy revenues continue to slide,

down 9.6% from last year, despite moneymakers like *BATMAN RETURNS* and Buena Vista's *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*. There were 25 fantasy titles released (26 last year). Science fiction has dropped precipitously, down 27% from last year's take, despite the success of *ENCINO MAN* and *HONEY, I BLEW UP THE KID*. Fox's *ALIEN 3*, the least successful of the series, raked in less than expected. There were 14 science fiction titles released (13 last year).

In the third quarter of 1992, horror accounted for 9.1% of all films, 13.4% of all receipts;

fantasy films accounted for 9.5% of all films and 11.9% of all receipts; while science fiction accounted for 5.4% of all films and 8.4% of all receipts. The total U.S. and Canadian boxoffice take of top-grossing genre films in the *Variety* totals are listed at right (through 10/26). For purposes of breakdown by genre, titles are indicated as horror (h), fantasy (f), and science fiction (sf), followed by number of weeks each title made the "Weekend Boxoffice Report" since January. Films first released in 1991 are indicated by an ●, but figures do not include prior year's earnings.

TOP GENRE FILMS OF '92

| | |
|--|---------------|
| BATMAN RETURNS (Wb, f, 17) | \$162,514,477 |
| BASIC INSTINCT (Tri, h, 29) | \$117,232,895 |
| THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE (Bv, h, 26) | \$ 87,553,000 |
| ● BEAUTY & THE BEAST (Bv, f, 36) | \$ 71,826,253 |
| DEATH BECOMES HER (U, h, 12) | \$ 57,131,565 |
| HONEY, I BLEW UP THE KID (Bv, sf, 14) | \$ 56,776,164 |
| ALIEN 3 (Fox, sf, 11) | \$ 54,927,174 |
| ● HOOK (Tri, f, 21) | \$ 48,386,776 |
| SINGLE WHITE FEMALE (Col, h, 10) | \$ 45,684,103 |
| ENCINO MAN (Bv, sf, 18) | \$ 40,057,130 |
| UNIVERSAL SOLDIER (Tri, sf, 13) | \$ 36,193,240 |
| THE LAWNMOWER MAN (Ni, sf, 16) | \$ 32,070,997 |
| SLEEPWALKERS (Col, h, 11) | \$ 29,068,075 |
| RAISING CAIN (U, h, 11) | \$ 21,171,695 |
| FERN GULLY (Fox, f, 10) | \$ 21,111,825 |

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REN & STIMPY

continued from page 5

late approvals, the late story comments . . . a month and a half late. We kept a complete record, and [MTV C.E.O.] Tom Freston looked at the stuff and said, 'Wow, there's really a problem here,' and then didn't do anything about it.

"You can say I'm staying as consultant, but I was fired as producer and director," said Kricfalusi. "I can consult to my heart's content for the rest of my life and I'm not going to get Ren and Stimpy cartoons made. You can't 'consult' a film."

While Kricfalusi was quick to point out his considerable admiration for Bob Camp's work, he also expressed concern for REN AND STIMPY's fate. "They've taken away the show so that there won't be any particular person in charge of it," said Kricfalusi. Bob Camp's not a producer, first of all—but neither are any of the other people they're calling producers. Everybody's a producer at the new studio; it's the all-producer studio. Bob's the only artist in that position."

The future remains unclear. Two Ren and Stimpy cartoons—"Sven Hoek" and a Christmas story, "Stimpy's First Fart"—were near completion; Nickelodeon had plans to have at least one on the air before 1993. Meanwhile, Kricfalusi is working on several proposed projects, including a feature film, THE RIPPING FRIENDS, and an operation that will produce theatrical shorts starring George Liquor (whom Nickelodeon has relinquished rights to) and Jimmy the Hapless Boy.

"If I could do whatever I wanted to do," said Kricfalusi, "I would just be a director within a studio structure that's already figured out. The kinds of cartoons I like to make are the ones with the psychological drama in them. That's my absolute favorite thing. You do the generic ones just to buy yourself some time and money, so that you can do the the ones that speak to people, ones in which people can identify with the motivations and emotional turmoils that a character is going through. That's what I love to do." □

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BAND ON THE RUN

continued from page 46

Bros project T-REX and Steven Spielberg's hotly anticipated JURASSIC PARK. "We'll beat them all out," said Band. "We're shooting ours this summer. We plan to produce four Moon Beam projects our first year."

Where does Band come up with all these ideas for Trancers and Dollmen and Demonic Toys and

Puppets? "I just dream this stuff up," he told the crowd at the Pickwick Theatre. "I have a lot of fun. But it's not like I have bad dreams or something. Well, I do have nightmares, but those are always about cash-flow."

Band's inspiration for making movies is less imagination than marketing acumen. "Every movie starts with the campaign," said Band of the key to his success. "If I

can't figure out a way to pique the interest of the buyers, then I've lost the battle before it's begun. We know what we're doing is working because since we've been in the business, we've had virtually no returns on tapes." □

PET SEMATARY TWO

continued from page 54

Lambert's take-no-prisoners ethos is a symptom of contempt for her

own material.

Finally, not the least of the miscalculation here is that this film about, and aimed at, junior high school kids is R-rated. For whatever demographic distribution, though, PET SEMATARY is off target. The trade-off—an hour and a half of lame punk horror for three minutes of vital punk rock—is a sucker bet. Invest in the Ramones' single. □

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LETTERS

IS THERE LIFE AFTER TWIN PEAKS?

You once did an article on director David Lynch entitled "Is There Life After Dune?" [16:4/5:4]. Your magazine seemed excited about Lynch's work then. Whereas I would have expected an in-depth story on the making of *TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME*, we got a measly article [23:2/3:14], reminding us that it was "booed at Cannes." Have you lost interest or given up on David Lynch?

I have heard reports that Lynch and Mark Frost will reteam to finally make the film *ONE SALIVA BUBBLE*. I think this would be a great opportunity to do a complete retrospective on the films of David Lynch, including Lynch's reasoning on what went wrong with *FIRE WALK WITH ME*.

Tony J. Severino
Haddonfield, NJ 08033

[We haven't lost interest. Lynch declined to be interviewed about *FIRE WALK WITH ME*.]

STAR TREK POLITICS

Having known several people who were employed by *STAR TREK*, I must say that you have captured the behind-the-scenes politics as they described them to me [23:2/3]. Your article was one of the first that I've read which reviewed events with a critical eye. What was particularly nice to see was that you didn't try to deify

Gene Roddenberry or to portray Rick Berman as pure evil.

Paul Czaplicki
Harbor City, CA 90710

STAR TREK'S GAY 90S?

Of special interest to me as a gay man was your *STAR TREK* article "Tackling Gay Rights" [23:2/3:71]. I have written several letters to the *ST:TNG* people, either complaining or making suggestions. Your even-handed, behind-the-scenes reporting helped fill the void about what some of the creators of *ST:TNG* think about homosexuality and human rights.

It is about time that *ST:TNG* started to address these issues. (The old *STAR TREK* showed the first interracial kiss, after all.) Now perhaps the entire audience—including gays and lesbians—can find their place in a future that is free from discrimination.

Kevin Havener
San Francisco, CA 94103

STAR TREK SCRIBE STRIKES BACK

You are one of the few magazines that give writers credit. I feel that when a writer survives the justifiably demanding story development process at *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION* and is lucky enough to become one of the chosen few honored to write for this show, that you could do him the favor of spelling his name correctly. It's Wilkerson, not Wil-

derson. I could handle the fact that Mark A. Altman didn't like "Imaginary Friend," [23:2/3:91] but it bugs me that he didn't like my name.

Ronald Wilkerson
Los Angeles, CA 90048

CREDITING TREK'S EFFECTS

Ron Moore and Gary Hutzel were referred to as assistants to myself and Rob Legato in your article on *STAR TREK*'s effects [12:2/3:39]. This is not the case and being referred to as such diminishes their incredibly valuable contributions to the show. Up until this season Ron and Gary were Visual Effects Coordinators and had a wide range of responsibilities ranging from scheduling and logistics, to direct creative involvement in bringing the effects into existence. Both men also served as Visual Effects Supervisors on several episodes where they had the opportunities to show the technical and creative resources that led to their being offered the position of Visual Effects Supervisors for this current season.

Another important member of the Visual Effects team that was omitted from the article is Visual Effects Associate David Takemura. David worked with both teams in various capacities and was instrumental in making it all happen. This season David was promoted to Visual Effects Coor-

dinator working with veteran effects supervisor David Stipes, who joined *TNG* this season.

Other long time veterans joining *STAR TREK* this year include Phil Barberio, who will be working as coordinator with Ron Moore. Joining the *DEEPSPACE NINE* Visual Effects crew this year will be Sue Jones and Judy Elkins, and Cari Thomas as Visual Associate. Eddie Williams will be serving in this capacity on *TNG*.

Dan Curry
Visual Effects Producer,
STAR TREK

CELEBRATING 2001

I enjoy your publication very much. Few magazines have maintained such a consistent standard of quality for such a long period of time. Your *STAR WARS* issue [6:4/7:1] is my all-time favorite. I've always wished you'd give 2001: *A SPACE ODYSSEY* similar treatment, a film that arrived too early on the scene to get such a break-down. With 2001: *A SPACE ODYSSEY* celebrating its 25th birthday, perhaps now would be a good time to do a retrospective, on its silver anniversary. It is just as much or more of a landmark film now as *STAR WARS* or *ALIENS*. And it always will be.

Keep up the great work on the magazine.

Jon Alderfer
Warminster, PA 18974

[We have a cover retrospective on the making of 2001 in preparation.]

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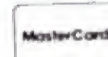
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